

## An International Perspective on Crisis Response

Every two years, the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF) hosts their World Congress in Baltimore, MD. It is a time for the 30 countries and countless organizations that employ the Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) model of crisis response to come together, share best practices and lessons learned.

CISM is the only model of crisis response that is designated as evidence-based by SAMHSA. It has been adopted by the United Nations as the model they provide to all of their staff throughout the world. In May 2019, representatives of CISM teams from 21 countries offered their perspectives on effectively responding to crisis while fostering



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resilience and the conditions for recovery and post-traumatic growth. Over the course of the week-long congress, participants had the opportunity to explore topics at multiple levels with presenters offering sessions on individual recovery and resilience through the lens of managing a personal health crisis to Ireland's Military Defense sharing how they employed CISM principles and strategies to support their sailors during a four year long humanitarian mission. By implementing these strategies, it was reported that there were no deployed servicemen and women that experienced PTSD symptoms, or suicide despite multiple deployments and circumstances that were often chaotic and tragic.

Addressing the needs of employees to increase their ability to respond within professions such as military, first response, and corrections was a key theme. Frameworks for health and human services were also presented. CCSI Sr. Consultant, Amy Scheel-Jones, discussed how the Consortium on Trauma, Illness and Grief in Schools (TIG) seamlessly blends principles of trauma-sensitive educational practice with CISM Group Crisis Skills. The TIG model demonstrates the value of increasing educators' professional capacity to respond to individual or group crisis to improve outcomes and decrease liability risk.



Several sessions explored this work at the micro-level. Emphasis was made on increasing cultural humility in crisis response -improving responders' ability to understand how racism, sexism, and other forms of systemic or historical trauma intersect with response work in times of acute crisis. Strategies for improving engagement and reducing stigma were offered.

Across these systems, cultures, and countries there were four key take-aways:

1. There is a tangible benefit to improved crisis response. Individual or large crisis takes a human toll. Work production, health, and well-being can be significantly impacted when one experiences a crisis, as well as when one responds to a crisis. Evidence shows that CISM is effective in reducing risks for adverse impacts.
2. Be prepared. Incorporate CISM planning and evidence-based skills into your Crisis Response plans. Policy and protocol related to crisis response must be developed with a trauma-responsive, equity lens.
3. Train and practice. Make sure that teams are certified in delivering CISM skills. These teams will need the opportunity to practice in order to build confidence and efficacy. Tabletop drills and refresher courses are effective means of on-going skill development.
4. Employ best practice, evidence-based frameworks. In times of stress and crisis, human thinking goes concrete and old habits can emerge. There is pressure to respond immediately but taking steps to follow CISM suggested protocols implementing CISM crisis response skills can support crisis management from the level of the individual to profound manmade or natural disasters.