**Critical Incident Crisis Debriefing Guidelines**

**Critical Incident Stress**

An acute stress reaction that produces considerable distress for staff member(s) involved following a **critical incident.**

Examples: (not an exhaustive list)

* Suicide/homicide
* Death of a client (child or adult)
* Egregious incidents
* Physical violence or assault against a worker
* Employee death
* Community-wide tragedy

**Critical Incident Stress Debriefing** is a formal and confidential process provided by trained facilitators in a group format to mitigate the impact of a critical incident and to accelerate the recovery process. The average length of a session is 2-3 hours held between 24 hours to 2 weeks after the incident. It is designed to achieve psychological closure. It is not therapy nor is it a long term process. Additional forms of support are often needed after a critical incident de-briefing to keep individuals engaged in a recovery process.

**Characteristics of Debriefers**

* Don’t need to be mental health professionals
* People who are trusted and respected
* People who are warm, affirming and non-judgmental
* They are competent and adequately trained
* Good communicators—have good listening skills
* Comfortable with people who have strong emotions
* Self-aware—recognize their own limitations and are willing to refer people on for further help
* Understand the work of human services professionals
* Ability to maintain confidentiality
* May be internal or external to the agency, but if internal they are not the immediate supervisor of the person(s) being de-briefed
* Strong value around self-care

These other types of stress require agency support or referral for professional help rather than a formal critical incident de-briefing. Supervisor support is critical in addressing these types of stress.

**Other types of stress** (related to day-to-day experiences)

* Secondary Traumatic Stress—the stress from helping or wanting to help a traumatized person
* General Stress—stress that everyone experiences that is resolved within a short period of time
* Cumulative stress—stress that builds up over time and can lead to mental and/or physical problems
* Continued Acute Stress or Post-traumatic Stress—severe distress caused by severe psychological trauma produced by critical incident stress and generally needs professional assistance

Examples are:

* Hearing about clients being victimized
* Visually seeing clients with bruises and other injuries
* Hearing about or witnessing self-mutilating behaviors
* Death of a family member or a friend
* Dealing with angry clients or colleagues

**Who can request a Debriefing?**

Because anyone might request a de-briefing, the agency needs to consider having a point person to initiate the referral. That point person would then identify de-briefers either internally or externally and work with the identified de-briefer(s) to determine:

* Whether the situation meets the definition of a critical incident
* How many and who is impacted by the incident
* Who will be involved in the de-briefing—will it be just those involved directly or will there also be debriefing for people from other units?
* How the agency needs to support the process—create a safe atmosphere, coverage for workers, communication with staff about the de-briefing
* Where people will go for ongoing support
* Whether the de-briefing will be voluntary or mandatory

**Characteristics of Agency Point Person**

* Trusted by their peers and superiors
* Knowledgeable about critical incident de-briefing
* Knowledgeable about resources for ongoing support (following the de-briefing or in lieu of de-briefing)
* Decisive
* Good communication skills
* Ability to maintain confidentiality