# WINK What I Need to Know!

## Critical Incident Stress Management

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

*What is a critical incident?*

Critical incident is any event that causes an unusually intense stress reaction. The distress people experience after a critical incident limits their ability to cope, impairs their ability to adjust, and negatively impacts the work environment.

*What are examples of critical incidents?*

Examples of traumatic events that produce such reactions include but are not limited to the following:

- A coworker's death or serious illness
- Suicide
- A violent or threatening incident in the work setting
- Natural or man-made disaster that affects the workers' ability to function in the workplace
- Child abuse
- Elder abuse
- Massive numbers of victims
- The duration of the crisis
- The scope of the crisis
- Exposure risk—bio-terrorism, nuclear
- Traumatic code
- Death of an infant or child
- Inappropriate and distressing interaction with another healthcare team member, patient, or family
- Sentinel Event

*What are signs and symptoms of stress related to a critical incident?*

They may include nervousness, anxiety, anger, frustration, irritability, mood swings, flashbacks, difficulty concentrating, lowered self-esteem, trusting others less, withdrawing from others, changes in appetite, sleep, or other habits, physical changes, and depression.

*What interventions are available to support our staff when critical incidents happen?*

**Emotional defusing** is only for those staff directly involved in the incident. It is an informal support group facilitated by a trained counselor designed to provide only emotional first aid to ensure that staff are able to continue with their shift, to ascertain whether there are support systems in place when they finish their shift, and to gauge which personnel, if any, are struggling to cope after the incident.
NOTE: Typically, defusing occurs immediately following the event.

**Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD)** is a process that prevents or limits the development of post-traumatic stress in people exposed to critical incidents. Professionally conducted debriefings help people cope with, and recover from an incident's after effects. CISD enables participants to understand that they are not alone in their reactions to a distressing event, and provides them with an opportunity to discuss their thoughts and feelings in a controlled, safe environment. It is not a form of therapy or treatment nor a critique of what happened.
NOTE: Typically, a debriefing takes place within 72 hours of the incident.

*Who can avail of these services?*
Any employee or physician. Participation is voluntary and confidential.

*How is critical incident stress management support services activated?*
By calling the Pastoral Care department 24/7.

References:
Blacklock, E. (2012). Interventions Following a Critical Incident: Developing a Critical Incident Stress Management Team. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing* , 2-8.
BHSF Policy: 5700 LifeWorks – Human Resources
HH Administrative Policy: 400-5610-1153 Emergency Operations Plan – Safety/Security