

**Bringing Your Crisis Team Home After A Disaster:  
Post Action Staff Support (PASS)  
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When you send team members to do work after a disaster, you need to do some things differently. First, you should send your most experienced personnel, people who not only know the model, but also have used it on many occasions. You may think that because you have experienced personnel going out, they know how to take care of themselves and each other. This is probably true for as long as they are in the field, but they will need help when they return home to their own community. You must plan for this before they leave. I would offer the following suggestions.

Before the team leaves, they should be briefed with as much information as you can give them about what they will be doing, and what they might experience. Using the Crisis Management Briefing model is one of the best ways of doing this. Working with disaster survivors is not like anything they have done before. The closest experience that seems to compare is a line of duty death. The experience for the CISM team members is often overwhelming, with story after story of heart wrenching scenes, visual imprints, and seemingly never ending pieces of emotional trauma. A disaster, by its nature, extends for a far longer time on scene, with more visual devastation and trauma than most of us see in a lifetime. This may very well be a life changing event for many team members, especially if they are providing CISM services to personnel after a particularly intense disaster.

Teams should not work more than a week at the disaster site. The trauma to the team will build with each day. The team should meet with each other at the end of each workday to do a mini-PASS of themselves. This helps prepare them for their work of the next day, and reminds them to do some of the things that they have been teaching participants during their CISM work. The team needs to take care of itself each day.

Second, before the team leaves, each member should sign an agreement that commits him or her to attending a PASS within five to seven days after their return. This is one of the most important things you need to do. Most volunteers returning from a disaster scene just want to escape it, and often think they are handling things just fine. This seems to be especially true for crisis response teams. It will not be true.

Third, the PASS should be completed by a team with at least one mental health professional. Some of the CISM team members may be in need of a more thorough mental health assessment or follow up activities. This team should not have been on site, so they do not have any direct trauma from this event. The PASS Team should be very experienced personnel who are trusted by their teammates.

The PASS model for major disasters is slightly different than the model that Paul LaBerteaux and I have recommended and that is outlined in the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation Suicide Prevention Workbook

### **HOW DO YOU DO IT?**

The Post Action Staff Support process uses a variation of the CISD. It consists of three phases, **REVIEW**, **RESPONSE**, and **REMIND**.

The **REVIEW** phase is essentially a combination of the Introduction/Fact/Thought phase of the regular CISD. It utilizes questions designed to have members think about and discuss the CISM activities and their participation in it. The following questions are examples of this phase:

- How did it go?
- What themes emerged?
- How do you think you did?
  - What “ditzzy” thing did you do?
  - What did you say that you wish you hadn’t?
  - What didn’t you say that you wish you had?
- What was one thing each of your teammates did that made the process go well?
- What was one thing each of your teammates did that may have made the process go astray?
- How might you have been better prepared for your work?

During this phase, the leader can guide the discussion into teaching what made the CISM response go well or give examples of other ways to have handled some aspect of the activities that might not have gone so well.

The **RESPONSE** phase is a condensation of the Reaction/Symptom phase of the CISD and works to elicit comments on the self perception of the team members and any concerns they may have about their performance. The following types of questions seem to work well:

- What is your most vivid memory of this response for you?
- What did you do that you wish you hadn’t?
- What didn’t you do that you wish you had?
- How has this experience affected you?
- What has been the hardest part of this experience for you?

During this phase, the leader guides some group discussion of the member’s self-impressions. If the person is blaming themselves for something or worried that they did something really wrong, it usually comes out during this phase. What then usually follows is reassurance by the other team members that no major errors occurred.

This is also an opportunity for the team leader and team members to reassure each other that each individual contributed to the process and to offer alternative methods for handling problem issues. This is the prime time to teach new techniques or reinforce what the team actually did.

The **REMIND** phase correlates to the Teaching/Re-entry phase of the ICISF Model. Questions in this step serve to help the team remember to do the same sort of things that we encourage the participants of our services to do.

- What have you done to do to take care of yourself since your return?
- What will it take for you to eventually “let go” of this experience?

### ***OTHER ACTIVITIES***

The PASS model described above is offered as one activity for team maintenance. But, of course, there are others that include:

- Follow up phone calls to provide private processing time for each team member
- Journaling or reporting about lessons learned
- Other opportunities to talk with one another about their experiences in a structured way
- An opportunity for the debriefing team to report to others about their experience and what they learned through the debriefing

By using this type of structured approach to your Post Action Staff Support process, you will help to minimize the effects of the disaster experience for your team members.

Helping them to recover as quickly as they can and preventing them from having long term effects should be the natural goal of all people involving in doing crisis response work. It is the thing that keeps us strong and ready to go out again. It is vital that we take care of ourselves as well as we take care of others.

By using this structured approach to a PASS, CISM teams are maximizing the opportunities for teaching members new skills, minimizing the chances for members returning home distressed or full of self doubt and assuring its members that they are valuable assets to the team. Being involved in a CISM team ought to be a rewarding experience for all team members it is our responsibility to take care of ourselves at least as well as we try to take care of others.

If we believe in what we are doing for the individuals we serve, we should believe in what we are doing for the individuals providing the services!