



DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC SAFETY OPERATING PROCEDURES MANUAL		
CHAPTER 114	EMPLOYEE WELLNESS AND CRITICAL INCIDENT DEBRIEFING	
	Effective: 05/08/2025	Commissioner Approval: 
	Authorities: AS 08.29.200, AS 08.29.220, AS 8.29.230, 12 AAC 62.400, 12 AAC 62.410, 12 AAC 62.420, AS 18.95.020 – 18.95.040	
	Applicability: ALL DEPARTMENTAL EMPLOYEES	
	Special Instructions: See Chapter 118	

114.100 INTRODUCTION

This OPM Chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the Department of Public Safety's (DPS) commitment to employee wellness. It outlines the resources available to all departmental employees, including mental health support services, critical incident debriefing procedures, and peer support programs. The chapter emphasizes confidentiality, employee rights, and the importance of proactive self-care and support-seeking behaviors.

DPS' Wellness Program is designed to ensure all employees receive adequate support, guidance, and resources. The cornerstone of this program is the Critical Incident Response Team (CIRT) Peer Support Team and the DPS clinician.

114.200 MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT SERVICES - CLINICIAN

DPS provides a range of mental health support services through an on-staff clinician. These services address various needs, including short-term and long-term counseling to include services for families.

All services will be available within 48 hours of an employee's request. Depending on the clinician's recommendation, services can be delivered in person or electronic platforms. The clinician will be available to attend Critical Incident Stress Debriefings.

A. *Scope of Services Provided:*

1. Counseling on an as-needed basis by members of the department who contact the contracted clinician for services.
2. The services the clinician is licensed and trained to practice.
3. Is to help individuals quickly or refer them to other services that may help, such as treatment centers and in-patient and out-patient care.

Scope of Services Not Provided:

1. Hiring psychological screenings.
2. Fit for Duty Screenings.

B. *Confidentiality:*

The clinician will keep all counseling sessions confidential and HIPAA compliant. The clinician is required to report mandatory reporting items according to the AK State Statute and the code of

ethics for AK Clinicians. The wellness clinician may be required to disclose otherwise confidential information about the treatment of a counseling client in the following situations:

1. Signed release;
2. Suspected abuse/neglect of a minor (AS 47.17.020);
3. Abuse/neglect of an elderly/disabled person (AS 47.24.010);
4. Imminent harm to oneself/others (AS 47.30.705);
5. Court order or federal law requirements.

To the extent possible, counseling clients will be notified if their information must be disclosed pursuant to a lawfully issued court order, including court orders requesting dates, sessions, and times.

C. *Duration of Services:*

1. Therapy sessions with the DPS wellness clinician are not meant to be long-term; they are not expected to exceed 12 sessions. The role of the DPS wellness clinician is to provide time-limited services that may result in: either:
 - a. Referral to a community mental health therapist for specialized treatment or a higher level of care.
 - b. Conclusion of treatment once the goals have been achieved
2. The clinician has the right to exercise their clinical judgment and continue treatment longer, with the recipient's consent, if a therapeutic benefit is found.

114.300 PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

A. *Psychological services available to employees.* An employee's contractual medical coverage may include psychological services. In addition, employees may seek consultations with API or an applicable employee assistance program, if needed and available. Contact with a health care provider will be treated as a confidential doctor/patient relationship unless the person is found to be a safety threat to human life.

1. If contact is made for consultation, employees and supervisors shall complete the SOA, Report of Occupational Injury or Illness (02-921).
2. If a criminal violation exists, the doctor will attempt to convince the individual to advise management of the situation.

B. *Types of psychological services available.* In cases of job related stress, such as a shooting incident, API or an employee assistance program provider is available to:

1. Assess the impact of the incident on the individual's career;
2. Assist the involved individual; and
3. Assure management of the individual's psychological health.

C. Requirement psychological services. An officer injured and/or involved in the use of deadly force is required to attend a post-incident intervention and education session with a mental health professional within seven (7) days of the incident, if at all possible. See OPM 118.610(B). Mandatory fit-for-duty evaluations will be required if an involved officer exhibits signs of stress as a result of the incident. See details in OPM Chapter 118.610.

114.310 CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS DEBRIEFING (CISD) - GENERAL DESCRIPTION

A. Stress debriefing needed by participants in critical incidents. Research indicates that most employees involved in stressful situations (critical incidents) may experience immediate or delayed effects. These incident-specific effects, known as post-traumatic stress disorder, may be immediate or delayed, psychological or physical or a combination of the two (2). An officer who has been involved in a critical incident is encouraged to undergo a stress debriefing.

Intervention with a psychologist, psychiatrist, or a CISD team, within 72 hours of a critical incident provides the employee a chance to verbalize personal concerns about the incident in a relaxed atmosphere.

B. Examples of critical stress incidents:

1. Serious injury or death of a coworker in connection with Department operations;
2. Suicide of a coworker;
3. Mass casualties including those with major trauma and extensive extrication rescue time;
4. Death of a child, violence to a child,
5. Loss of a life following extraordinary and prolonged expenditure of physical and emotional energy during rescue efforts;
6. Incidents attracting highly unusual or critical news media coverage; or
7. Any incident charged with profound emotion, unusual circumstances, distressing sights and sounds; or
8. Repeated exposure to high risk, low-frequency incidents in a limited time frame; or
9. Multiple events over time of the aforementioned nature.

C. Critical incident debriefing is separate from other inquiries. All debriefings are separate and apart from administrative and criminal investigations. Employees are required to cooperate with administrative investigations in compliance with personnel rules, union contracts, and the OPM.

CIRT's role is pivotal in providing support and discussing common reactions (emotional, behavioral, psychological, and physical) that those affected by the incident, directly or indirectly, may experience. CIRT will provide practical coping and self-care strategies that may help mitigate any reactions they experience.

Peers can also suggest psychological services and training. The debriefing is confidential, with the only exception being mandatory reporting items, of which participants are informed.

D. *Types of critical incident debriefing.* There are five (5) primary types of stress debriefings.

1. On-scene/Near-scene debriefing provides the on-site officer(s) with support, encouragement, counseling, and evaluation;
2. Initial debriefing occurs shortly after the incident and provides a status report on the incident and related injuries;
3. Formal debriefing occurs:
 - a. Within 72 hours of an incident for employees who are not directly involved in a shooting; or
 - b. After a 72 hour recovery period for officers directly involved in a shooting.

Each debriefing is a confidential non-judgmental meeting where the employee's feelings, involvement, thoughts and stress-related symptoms are discussed.

4. Follow-up debriefing deals with delayed or prolonged stress symptoms weeks or months after the incident; and
5. Individual consults are one-to-one counseling sessions (requires a referral to a mental health professional).

114.320 INITIATING A CRITICAL INCIDENT DEBRIEFING

A. *Officers involved in a deadly force incident to be placed on administrative leave.* Any officer involved in a deadly force incident resulting in personal injury shall be removed from the scene by another officer/supervisor as soon as practical and shall return to the scene only if necessary and approved by Command authority. All other personnel at the scene shall be screened by the next level supervisor to determine whether they should be left on duty or given the rest of the shift off.

1. The officer shall be debriefed in a non-threatening environment after a recovery time of approximately 72 hours; this debriefing shall not be held before the preliminary investigation.
2. The officer shall be given administrative leave for a minimum period of seven (7) days. The period of administrative leave may be extended at the Commander's discretion. Investigators may contact the officer during this period for purposes of the investigation.
3. The officer's supervisor shall be responsible for completion of the SOA Report of Occupational Injury or Illness (02-921).
4. The supervisor shall be responsible for alerting the CISD Team (See 114.330).

B. *Certain officers are encouraged to attend debriefing.* A critical incident stress debrief shall be conducted by qualified and trained personnel after investigators have conducted initial formal interviews. This is a voluntary participatory action and is not the same as a tactical debrief. The CISD should not include the officers that used deadly force in the incident nor should specific information about the event be disclosed. The purpose of the CISD is to allow all other involved employees to express and share feelings and emotions about the incident in general as they cope with the aftermath.

1. The employee(s) will be advised as to the time and location for debriefing. Time spent attending debriefing will be scheduled duty time.
2. The Commander will be notified immediately upon the request for debriefing of an employee.
3. The debriefing team has no supervisory, advisory, medical, legal or other authority over the officer, and the officer is not required to follow their advice; however, it should be kept in mind that the team is made up of fellow public servants who may have experienced similar situations.

C. *Any employee may initiate critical incident debriefing.* Any employee who feels that he or she is in need of a critical incident debriefing may initiate a call to a CISD Team with or without advising his or her supervisor of the call. Employees are responsible for identifying and recognizing significant incidents for which they or others may require debriefing. If the employee initiates the call, the employee will use personal time to attend the meeting.

D. *Call out of CISD team.* If CISD is needed, the affected employee's immediate Supervisor will contact the nearest available CISD team and arrange for a preliminary debriefing as soon as possible after the employee has been relieved from the scene.

The Alaska Police and Fire Chaplains (907-272-3100) maintains a statewide roster of CISD teams.

E. *Department will cover cost of CISD team travel.* If an employee experiences a critical incident and there is no team available locally, the Department will cover the costs associated with critical incident stress debriefing to include team travel to an incident location if necessary.

F. *Facilitation and participation in critical incident debriefing.* Employees participating in CISD or supervisors organizing a debriefing should keep the following factors in mind to assure a successful meeting.

1. If the Anchorage CISD Team is utilized they will provide a team of volunteers of at least two (2) members, possibly three (3), consisting of one (1) mental health person, and one (1) to two-(2) peer debriefing team members. This team will conduct the actual debriefing.
2. When required, the Department will provide the CISD Team with a place to conduct the debriefing, preferably a neutral location (school, church, large home, etc.). Chairs should be arranged in a circle.

3. Responders from any agency who participated in the critical incident may be invited to take part in the debriefing. Do not invite witnesses, the press, family members, or other affected individuals. The CISD team leader should be made aware of interest expressed by any of the above groups.
4. Electronic communication should be silenced.
5. The team coordinator is responsible for organizing any formal debriefings to ensure the quality of the debriefing and adherence to procedure.
6. The Team Leader will contact the Commander, or designee, within 24 hours to determine the exact needs and coordinate the scheduling of the debriefing.
7. Team members will coordinate a time and location to meet prior to the debriefing to discuss the incident, available resource information and the approach to be used during the debriefing.
8. All information discussed during a debriefing shall be discussed only with attendees of the debriefing. Concerns shall be brought to the attention of the CISD team members.
9. It is prohibited to make recordings or take written notes during a debriefing.
10. Presence of media personnel during debriefing is not authorized.

114.330 MANAGING PERSONNEL AFTER CRITICAL INCIDENT

This section provides guidance and suggestions for supervisors and commanders confronted with the aftermath of a critical incident.

- A. Commander responsible for informing participant employee.** The employee's Commander or Director is responsible for communicating case status information to the employee.
- B. Supervisors to brief uninvolved employees.** Supervisors, not the employee at the scene, will brief coworkers on the incident. This will be done so that rumors can be controlled and affected employees will not be harassed.
- C. Supervisors and coworkers will listen to employee.** Following the investigation, supervisors and coworkers are reminded to listen when the employee wants to talk about the incident so the employee's feelings about the incident can be expressed openly.
 1. Often, individuals will avoid talking about the incident and deny any negative feelings; however, through patience and active listening, the employee can be encouraged to discuss the situation.
 2. Supervisors shall provide support for returning to duty.

114.340 MEMBERSHIP IN DEBRIEFING TEAM

There are critical incident stress debriefing teams throughout Alaska. Employees who have experienced critical incidents and feel they would like to help others who have been involved in a critical incident are encouraged to become involved with a team.

114.350 CIRT/PEER TO PEER SUPPORT TEAM

Peer support team members are trained to actively listen, gather information, provide informed feedback, assess situations, clarify problems, and make appropriate referrals. They are not therapists and do not make diagnoses.

CIRT / Peer to Peer support counseling is confidential, including written and/or verbal communication between a peer team member and the employee. Communications are defined and protected under AS 18.95.020-18.95.040.

114.360 AVAILABILITY TO OTHER AGENCIES

CIRT will be made available to any other agency in Alaska that requests the team on a case-by-case basis. That agency can make this request at any level. The request will be in writing and detail the need/want for DPS response, i.e., deconfliction, no team available, and the size of the incident.

114.400 DPS CHAPLAINCY PROGRAM:

The program is designed to provide emotional and spiritual support to department employees and the public who have suffered a traumatic event. The positions are non-funded, volunteer, and conform to the rules established by the Alaska Police Chaplain Association (APCA). All chaplains must meet the minimum criteria set by APCA. Additional information regarding the DPS Chaplaincy Program can be found in the "Chaplain Manual" on ATU SharePoint under the Health and Wellness Folder.

114.500 SELF-REPORTING

This policy establishes a voluntary program aimed at rehabilitating Alaska Department of Public Safety employees (commissioned and non-commissioned) struggling with substance abuse and mental health issues. It seeks to preserve employees' dignity and careers in a supportive, non-judgmental environment. Encouraging self-reporting and early intervention is crucial to prevent personal tragedy or misconduct. The program includes confidential support from peers or supervisors to empower employees in managing their challenges. Peers are required to report mandatory reporting items in accordance with AS 18.95.030.

A. *Employees whom self-report issues can expect:*

1. Confidential discussions with peer support members..
2. Referrals to qualified counselors/clinicians.

3. Possible temporary reassignment or administrative leave during treatment upon mutual agreement.
4. Potential Fitness for Duty (FFD) evaluations post-treatment.

B. PROCEDURES:

1. Employees self-reporting to peer support members are encouraged to identify needed resources.
2. Peer support members will contact the wellness coordinator for assistance.
3. The wellness coordinator may advocate for the employee between treatment providers and the department.
4. The coordinator will arrange treatment options, considering insurance coverage.
5. Post-treatment, the wellness coordinator will support employee reintegration into regular duties.

114.510 LEAVE DURING TREATMENT

DPS recognizes the importance of providing its employees with the necessary time to participate in in-patient treatment.

Employees may be granted up to two (2) instances of administrative leave to support their in-patient treatment. Administrative leave for treatment will be considered on a case-by-case basis. When administrative leave is not granted, an employee may invoke FMLA and use personal leave.