

Critical Incident Wellbeing Session – a short guide

What is a Critical Incident Wellbeing Session (CIWS)?

A CIWS is an informal but structured support meeting offered to staff who have been exposed to a potentially traumatic event (PTE) or series of events during the course of their shift or working day. Research has shown that despite the training, knowledge and experience that people who work in high risk environments e.g. the emergency services, military, mental health settings etc have the potential to be adversely affected by events they experience whilst carrying out their duties. There is always the potential for them to be impacted psychologically and emotionally by the work they do and this can also have a cumulative effect over time if regular support is not sought or provided in a timely consistent manner.

What is involved and who can attend?

Attendances at meetings are always voluntary, but it is worth noting that whilst you may not have been affected by the event/s, that *your attendance and contribution may nevertheless be really helpful and supportive to others*. The meetings are not intended as operational reviews, a critique of practice, or counselling but to provide support to colleagues who have been exposed to an extremely stressful or PTE in the course of their work. There will be no managers present unless of course they were closely involved with the event. Only those present or impacted by the event are invited to attend. No notes are taken, and nothing is fed back to senior management as the aim of these meetings is that staff feel comfortable, safe and supported.

What happens during a CIWS?

The meeting is an opportunity to 'debrief' the events/s during a protected time frame and usually last between 1.5-2 hours (depending on the size of group, the incident etc). The meetings will be facilitated by staff trained to facilitate CIWSs – these will be your *peers* who are colleagues in the organisation, *but not your manager*. The meeting is structured through a series of phases as follows:

- **Introductions:** As well as an introduction to the facilitators and participants, there is a discussion of ground rules e.g. confidentiality, the aims of the meeting, agenda etc
- **Facts:** This is an overview of ‘what happened’ – *not in minute detail or for operational purposes*, but essentially a general overview of what happened from everyone’s perspective.
- **Thoughts and reactions:** This is discussion of everyone’s thoughts and reactions within the context of their experience during the event and after
- Finally, the next two phases are spent on **Normalisation:** i.e. a discussion of common reactions to such events, the impact of such events and some explanation if possible as why we may think or feel in a certain way when confronted by significant stressors. Then there is **Future coping and planning:** this consists of advice; guidance and suggestions for mutual support and where you can access further support if needed.
- Finally the last part of the meeting is described as **Disengagement:** this is where the meeting draws to a close, but this also time for any further discussion and questions as well as filling out a very brief evaluation form as to your experiences of the meeting. There is also an opportunity to speak to facilitators outside of the group if needed.

Some simple ground rules:

- There will be no breaks or interruptions, but of course brief toilet breaks are allowed if needed
- We ask that attendees switch off mobile phones etc, but if you need to take an urgent call (e.g. for child care, being on call) , please ask a colleague to manage this for you and make the appropriate arrangements
- We ask that everyone who attends, stays for the full duration of the meeting – if you think you may be late or you have to leave early, please contact one of the facilitators asap before the meeting, so alternative arrangements can be made for you to access support.

Please feel free to ask any questions before the meeting if you have any concerns.

How do I request a CIWS?

- **Incident Commanders*** liaise with the Line Manager / Watch Manager and contact the CIWS Supporter team via ciws@syfire.gov.uk if a CIWS needs to be instigated.
- Our CIW Supporters will then get in touch with Line / Watch Managers to agree a suitable venue and time for the CIWS to be delivered.
- Complete the 'hot debrief' question-set within the MDTs answering 'yes' to 'is this a critical wellbeing incident?' This will send an automatic notification to the CIWS team.
 - We still want to encourage Incident Commanders to also submit a request independent of the MDT.

**: CIWSs can also be requested by Line Managers, Watch Managers, staff involved in the incident, OH, HR, Health and Safety or CIW Supporters. To do so this request can be made directly to ciws@syfire.gov.uk*

CURRENT UPDATE (Aug 2020): As you are all aware, due to the unprecedented nature of the Coronavirus impact, the Service is having to adapt on a daily basis to balance the health and wellbeing of the workforce with the vitally important functions that need to be delivered.

The face-to-face group CIW support available to crews, watches and staff following a critical incident is still available. We will adopt social distancing measures during delivery.

During the Coronavirus pandemic we continued to offer CIWS via phone or video link in a one-to-one format with one of our SYFR CIW Supporters. This method of delivery may still be requested.

The method of delivery will be considered on a case-by-case basis and this will consider up to date government guidance around social distancing and reducing the risk of viral transmission.



South Yorkshire
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Please check out the [NEW SYFR health and wellbeing website](#) for more information and for the CIW Policy.