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To: Regional Managers
Directors, Local Offices, Department of Child Services

From: James W. Payne, Director
David Judkins, Deputy Director of Field Operations
Angela Green, Deputy Director of Practice Support
Department of Child Services

Subject: DCS Critical Response Unit
DCS-08-10

In recognition of the challenging work being done every day by Department of Child Services (DCS) employees, and with special concern for supporting employees through exceptionally difficult aspects of working in child welfare, DCS has developed a team of specially trained field staff, the DCS Critical Response Unit, who can provide supportive interventions to employees when critical events occur.

This administrative letter outlines the DCS Critical Response Unit and the protocol for referring an employee for a response by a Critical Response Unit member.

The DCS Critical Response Unit is comprised of Family Case Managers, Supervisors, Directors, and Regional Managers from across the state, as well as Central Office employees who work within the Field Operations unit. Utilizing aspects of Psychological First Aid, the Critical Response Unit members provide interventions that are brief (generally one meeting with limited follow-up) and aimed at assisting employees in identifying and meeting any practical or emotional needs that may result from a critical or high-stress event. The interventions can occur in individual and group formats, depending on the nature of the incident. Research has shown that having this type of forum to ventilate and re-group after such an incident may reduce the duration and intensity of ongoing stress associated with it.



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This intervention does not constitute, nor is it a substitute for, mental health therapy. Should an employee decide that an ongoing mental health service may be necessary or beneficial beyond this intervention; the Critical Response Unit responder can assist in the information and referral process to help facilitate this service.

Participation in this service is completely **voluntary** and is no way related to conditions of continued employment with DCS.

A response by the Critical Response Unit may be necessary or beneficial after a variety of child welfare related incidents, including but not limited to:

- A fatality of a child or parent involved with the agency
- A near-fatality or significant injury to a child or parent involved with the agency
- Threat of harm or actual harm to a worker, during and related to their performance of DCS duties
- Any case receiving a high degree of media scrutiny aimed at a particular DCS Local Office or worker(s)
- The death of a DCS co-worker
- Any other child welfare related assessment or situation which seems particularly difficult for an employee and is deemed appropriate and necessary by supervisory/management staff.

Referral

A DCS Critical Response Unit intervention may be initiated by contacting your Regional Manager and providing to them the information necessary to facilitate a referral. This information may be easily completed on the brief Critical Response Unit referral form. Your Regional Manager can then assist in facilitating a response. If you are referring someone other than yourself, please ensure that the individual being referred has indicated their willingness to be contacted by a Critical Response Unit member and participate in this service. The goal of the program is to provide a supportive response to employees in need within 24-48 hours of a critical event.

Responses by the Critical Response Unit will be accommodated during business hours, with after-hours responses being minimal and only occurring if mutually agreed upon by the employee, the Critical Response Unit member, and their respective supervisors and deemed necessary due to unique demands of workload or schedules.

Confidentiality

In order to provide the most emotionally safe and supportive response possible, these interventions will be implemented with the utmost consideration of issues of confidentiality. As with any confidential service, if issues of safety to the employee, a child, or any other person come to the attention of the responder, they have a duty to inform appropriate parties to minimize risk to anyone involved. All other information not directly related to or affecting safety will be maintained between an employee and the responder.

As a further measure to ensure privacy, these meetings may take place at an off-site location mutually agreed upon by the employee and the Critical Response Unit member.



If you have any questions regarding this program, please address them to Nikki Henderson, Clinical Consultant, at Nicole.Henderson@dcs.in.gov

Sincerely,

James W. Payne, Director
Department of Child Services

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