

# The Resilient Whole:

*Crisis Support Throughout Your Organization*

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## Crisis Support Throughout Your Organization

It's an unavoidable truth: an atmosphere of unease has saturated our culture, driven by constant coverage of worldwide tragedy and civil disquiet. The events themselves play out across a spectrum of human interactions, from conflict in the home and workplace to attacks on soft targets around the globe.

Yet, organizations continue to resist the need for employee services that will build and reinforce resiliency throughout their workforce in the wake of a traumatic event. It is difficult to consider the **What-If** hypothetical when the **It Won't Happen Here** mentality prevails, but **What-If** thinking can lead to a sense of workplace security, confidence in the organization and saved lives. The scale of impact shifts—from a workplace death or nationwide cyberattack to a natural disaster resulting in significant employee casualties and business disruption—but the need for resiliency remains.

Employees look to employers to care for their well-being and provide the resources necessary for pre-incident preparedness and post-incident resilience. It is the employer's responsibility to ensure their talent, their *human resources*, are adequately invested in.

What best practices help maintain the organization in a holistic way that ultimately accounts for tragedy both large and small? The answer is two-fold, and we'll explore both.

### Critical Incident Response

Resiliency, especially psychological, can be greatly tested in times of crisis. People have a baseline understanding of "normal," and while each individual's normal varies, everyone has an overall sense of balance and safety to their daily lives and in the world around them. During a traumatic event, however, concepts of normal are broken and afterwards rebuilt into a "new" normal worldview—but not without help.

Critical incident response (CIR) provides just this type of support. Often referred to as a debriefing, CIR allows for organizations to attend to employee needs immediately following a traumatic event (such as an employee death), ensuring the quick and efficient handling of psychological and emotional trauma stemming from the situation. CIR often is included with an employee assistance program (EAP) benefit, so post-incident follow-up counseling support will be covered by the employer for a predetermined number of sessions. It is critical that the human resources department convey this benefit information to employees after—but ideally before—an event.



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A comprehensive CIR will provide 24/7 access to the organization's critical incident provider partner, and will include the following in its suite of services:

- Thorough understanding of organizational culture and environment
- Consistent procedures in addressing traumatic events
- Delivery of services by a licensed counseling professional (preferably a trauma specialist with a master's or higher) with expertise in understanding the impact of traumatic events on individuals
- On-site debriefing services within 24 to 48 hours following a traumatic event, or sooner if necessary
- Information detailing "normal" reactions to traumatic events
- Follow-up services, like those described below, to aid in the recovery process

With CIR, the counselor is key. An organization's critical incident provider will ideally have a local network of counselors to draw from if and when a crisis event occurs, deploying them appropriately and promptly to the requested site. Counselors will assist employees and their families, if applicable, by administering psychological first aid as they discuss the trauma just experienced. (It's

important to note that psychological first aid is *not* counseling, but rather a support practice that allows individuals or groups to talk in a confidential environment about the reactions, thoughts and emotions experienced during a traumatic incident.) Follow-up services ensure consistent support for psychological and emotional well-being, and incoming counselors will be attuned to the nuances of the employees' workplace culture.

*Psychological first aid is a support practice that allows impacted employees to confidentially discuss reactions, thoughts and emotions.*

CIR is a resiliency tool used to address the immediate needs of trauma-impacted employees and can be accessed one-on-one, in group settings or as an organizational whole, depending on need. These debriefings provide opportunities for employees to learn about the psychological and physical impact of trauma, "typical" reactions to a traumatic event and any future reactions that could occur. When this information is made available to individuals following a traumatic event, it reassures them that the effects they are experiencing are normal and that the event was the abnormality.

Additionally, CIR should be made available to all staff impacted by the event, including management. Leadership, human resources and other management may be affected by the event while facing the extra challenge of ensuring business continuity. The EAP can engage with leadership in advance of any incident to guarantee their psychological well-being, too, is supported.

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Some organizations believe CIR is a “one size fits all” service, suitable for any crisis situation. While CIR is a multifaceted benefit with a range of capabilities, its effectiveness can be constrained by the potential scale and scope of an event. A CIR is effective for events most organizations accept as probable, but not for the **What If** events we believe **Won't Happen Here**.

Even so, there are still ways to ensure your organization is prepared for, can respond to and recover from worst case scenarios.

### Crisis Management and Preparing for the Unthinkable

Crisis management planning and preparedness can not only circumvent the full outcome of an unforeseen event, but can also deliver an all-encompassing strategy to serve the needs of the whole organization. A well-prepared organization will capitalize on three distinct aspects of crisis management: planning, response and recovery.

#### ***Planning and Preparedness***

The foundation of any crisis management program is the time and effort put into a comprehensive risk assessment of an organization and the planning and preparedness for responding to potential post-assessment risks. This preparation, as well as the people involved, will determine whether or not organizational response to a crisis is successful.

Most organizations have prepared disaster recovery or business continuity plans focusing on the infrastructure and technological components of business, but what about the human element? When considering how a crisis might impact your employees and their families, additional protocols will be necessary.



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While some organizations have internal teams designed for the purpose of crisis management, it is wise to contract with a professional third party with a history of expertise so that preventative measures can be as fruitful as possible. Such experts will aid you and your team in:

- Organizational risk assessment
- Consultation on current needs
- Emergency response plan review and/or development benchmarking against best practices for the industry
- Training
- Preparedness exercises (critical tasks, tabletops or full-scale)

Regular training, drills and exercises normalize the idea of a crisis situation in the work environment and assuage the notion that **It Won't Happen Here**. Repeated testing allows for frequent re-evaluation of the crisis plan. In a world where change is constant and circumstances are always shifting, the resourceful organization finds time to test its programs and protocols. Don't allow your plan to become stale; test it on an annual basis, if not throughout the year. This can be accomplished through a tabletop exercise or, if you have the support of the organization and possibly your community, with a full-scale exercise.



### Additional questions for you to consider are:

- *Will you be able to handle incoming calls from employees, family members, customers, vendors or other concerned stakeholders internally, or would a qualified external partner bring value?*
- *Have you explored mutual aid agreements with nearby businesses?*
- *If you needed to evacuate 500 employees, have you designated a location where they can safely congregate and be accounted for?*

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### ***Responding to an Event***

The word “crisis” invokes feelings of chaos, panic and fear, but effective crisis management can turn a chaotic situation into an orderly one.

Practical response will capitalize on training, drills, plan evaluation and assets such as pre-scripted communications, emergency inquiry centers and accounting for people protocols. These will increase your ability to respond as efficiently as possible during a crisis.

External resources are also critical. Make sure your organization has communicated with local emergency responders so you’re aware of their roles, responsibilities and any expectations they may have concerning their involvement during an incident.

*Effective crisis management can turn a chaotic situation into an orderly one.*

### ***Post-Incident Response and Recovery***

Once an event is over, an organization still faces the need for employee support, stakeholder reassurance and brand protection. Crisis communication is critical to protecting an organization’s brand and identity, and the success of your crisis management plan should prove its necessity to executives, board members or any other external interests.

Post-incident response also includes after-action meetings and the sharing of lessons learned so that the crisis management plan can be re-evaluated and amended according to the success—or potential shortcomings—of the process.

An often overlooked aspect of recovery is the impact it has on those responding to an event. In the public setting, this typically implies public safety personnel and first responders. In the private setting, this may mean human resources, public relations, executives or any other key members of your response team charged with supporting response, business continuity, employees or their families.

The trauma experienced by crisis survivors, victims and their families is well documented, but the traumatic effects on responders has been largely ignored. Those responsible for notifying families that a tragedy has occurred or for assisting victims and families post-incident are at the same risk for trauma as the victims themselves. Debriefings and counseling support for affected personnel and their families goes a long way to maintaining employee resilience in the face of a new normal.

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### The Big Picture: Using Crisis Management and CIR Together

Both crisis management and CIR serve to maintain business operations for an organization during and after a traumatic event, be it in the preparation of a top-down crisis event or increasing individual employee resilience before, during and after a traumatic incident.

In an effort to explore the utility of both crisis management and CIR, let's consider the following illustration:

Your workplace experiences a security breach in its digital communication systems. Previously confidential employee information is released online to the public including names, addresses, telephone numbers and social security identifiers. Not only that, but your IT specialists find private emails also were included in the breach. Employees experience concern, worry and outrage.

*Both crisis management and CIR serve to maintain business operations for an organization during and after a traumatic event.*

#### **The organization implements its crisis management protocols, initiating the following:**

- A company-wide digital lockdown to establish the nature of the breach. A pre-determined and clearly detailed communication plan is deployed by designated team members and involves an immediate all-staff, in-person meeting to provide information to employees
- The crisis management provider is contacted in order to assist with the implementation and coordination of the plan
- An off-site, third party call center is activated to relay pertinent information to employees and their families and redirect public and media inquiries concerning the breach
- The human resources department shares information with staff about contacting credit reporting agencies to discuss fraudulent activity based on leaked personal information. HR will also provide additional support to employees either directly or, if the organization has an EAP, remind them of the support resources available
- Upper management communicate with authorities, who will investigate the nature of the breach, and begin coordinating the official response

With the immediate crisis contained, your crisis management provider will continue working with you to sustain business continuity and operations in the wake of the breach, attending to staff needs as they arise.

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However, a month later, an employee upset by the leak of his/her personal information returns to work, waits in the parking lot and shoots one of the coworkers he/she feels is somehow responsible for the breach, killing them. The employee then commits suicide. Multiple staff witness the event.

Your organization requires a CIR and contacts its EAP provider for help. They assess the situation with you and provide recommendations on the support needed. The provider then locates a trauma specialist in the area, briefs them on the situation, discusses scheduling the CIR and provides your contact information. The trauma specialist reaches out to you to coordinate on-site support. Following the CIR, some staff indicate they would like additional counseling support sessions. This counseling benefit extends also to employees' families, including the families of the victim as well as the shooter.

It's rare for a single organization to experience such extreme situations in so short a time, but far from impossible. Our example organization, exhibiting the need for both crisis management and CIR services, was prepared for a range of potential crisis scenarios and is more resilient because of it.

### The FEI Difference

We've discussed the core differences between CIR and crisis management services and explored the importance of having both available to your organization when addressing the full spectrum of crisis recovery. Organizations which have embraced the **What-If** mentality and removed the belief that **It Won't Happen Here** will readily recognize the shortcomings of relying solely on CIR for their planning and response needs. Those organizations that partner with one provider for both CIR and crisis management allow for continuity of services, confidence and ease of operations.

FEI is a leading force in the field of crisis management and has over 35 years of EAP experience, including CIR. Our crisis expertise combines with an international network of trauma specialists to guarantee organizations will be supported in any crisis situation, scalable from small business culture to multi-property corporations.

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We help organizations and their employees with life's daily challenges, the unplanned critical incident and the unimaginable crisis by administering meaningful support services to victims and victim families. By working with FEI to fulfill your CIR and crisis management needs, your organization can expect to have:

- A dedicated consultant
- Comprehensive organizational risk assessments
- Best practice plans for supporting your employees during a crisis
- A crisis communication plan for internal and external stakeholders
- An emergency call center as an additional crisis response resource to immediately respond to employee and family inquiries
- The ability to account for your staff's location, status and needs throughout a crisis
- Tools to collect, sort and maintain information through the use of FEI's exclusive web-based information system
- Resources for mitigating the overall effects of trauma



FEI has responded to thousands of critical incidents and provided crisis support as a result of workplace violence, organizational restructuring, natural disasters and man-made catastrophes involving mass casualties such as cyberattacks and acts of terrorism. As a leader in preparedness, response and recovery associated with the human dimensions of crisis and trauma, we integrate a unique perspective on behavioral health support through the framework of crisis management experience and an understanding of workforce resiliency practices.

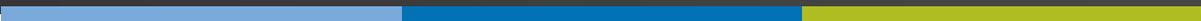
No matter the size of your workforce or the scope of your operations, ensuring your organization has the proper systems to support employees in times of trauma is a proven benefit. As an employer concerned about the well-being of your staff, don't wait until a crisis erupts; prepare your organization—and your people—today.



# fe*i* workforce resilience



*FEI partners with you to protect and enhance your workforce effectiveness and organizational resiliency. We offer flexible solutions for the full spectrum of your workforce resilience goals, from EAP and wellness to crisis preparedness and management. We leverage our proven resources, compassionate experts and robust network to improve your employees' focus, empower your managers and prepare you to handle the unthinkable crisis, so that you can maintain a healthy, resilient organization.*



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