

Critical Incident Stress Management: CISM

Source: A New Era and Standard of Care in Crisis Intervention, Everly & Mitchell, 2002

Types of CISM Interventions

- **Pre-Incident Preparation & Education**
- **One-on-One/Individual Peer Crisis Intervention**
- **Demobilization**
- **Crisis Management Briefing**
- **Defusing**
- **Critical Incident Stress Debriefing**
- **Family Support Intervention**
- **Organizational / Community Crisis Response**
- **Spiritual Crisis Intervention**
- **School Crisis Management**

Critical Incidents:

Events that have the potential to create significant human distress and can overwhelm one's usual coping mechanisms.

Psychological Crisis:

An Acute Response to a Trauma, Disaster, or Other Critical Incident Wherein:

- 1) Psychological Balance Is Disrupted**
- 2) One's Usual Coping Mechanisms Have Failed**
- 3) Evidence of Significant Distress, Impairment, Dysfunction**

The psychological distress in response to critical incidents such as mass disasters, traumatic events, or terrorist attacks, is called a PSYCHOLOGICAL CRISIS. (Everly & Mitchell, 1999)

CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT AWARENESS

STRESS

Stress is that normal state of physical and psychological arousal, which we all need in order to function. Without stress we would lack challenges in life and fail to be motivated. However, stress can be difficult to live with when the stress is the result of a bad or difficult experience.

CRITICAL INCIDENTS

"A critical incident is any situation faced by emergency services personnel that cause them to experience unusually strong emotional reactions that have the potential to interfere with their ability to function either at the scene or later," Jeffery Mitchell, Ph.D. Some examples of critical incidents include:

serious injury of a colleague
loss by death of a colleague
injury or death of children

media interest in the event
prolonged events
mass casualty incidents

suicides
natural disasters

STRESS AND THE EMERGENCY SERVICES PERSONNEL

Emergency services personnel face stress in everyday events. The work they choose to perform can be emotionally difficult, physical draining, and a threat to their personal safety. Yet, this same work is seen as extremely rewarding, sometimes exciting, and a method for fulfilling some personal needs. But the work still presents the emergency services personnel with a constant dose of low to moderate stress and an occasional dose of high level stress. It is this high level stress that can cause the emergency worker to have symptoms of a stress reaction including fatigue, nausea, intestinal upsets, memory loss, concentration problems, problem solving difficulties, anxiety, fears, depression, identification with the victims, nightmares, flashbacks, and fear of repetition of the stressful event.

CISD (CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS DEBRIEFING) (One intervention strategy of the CISM Concept)

A CISD is a group interaction where a team of trained mental health professionals and emergency services personnel, called peer debriefers, allow emergency services personnel to talk about their thoughts, actions, and reactions to a stressful event. A CISD is **not** a group therapy, and it is **not** a critique of the event. The information shared in a debriefing is strictly confidential. A CISD is a time to learn what is **normal** expected behaviors and feelings following a stressful event. It is also a time to learn ways to manage stress symptoms.

THE TEAM APPROACH

North Carolina has chosen to institute the CISM concept through team approaches. When a CISD is conducted, you should expect two to four members to be present. All members of the team will have been trained in the CISM concept by trained educators as identified by the North Carolina Critical Incident Stress Management Advisory Council. This consistent training approach is helpful in interventions targeted to larger scale disaster situations where areas are asked to assist neighboring areas by offering mutual aid. Other intervention strategies include, on-site, one-on-one, defusings, and crisis management briefings. NCCISM has 17 teams in the state.

WHEN TO REQUEST A DEBRIEFING

You should feel free to talk with the CISM team coordinator in your area about the need for a debriefing any time you or your fellow workers are having difficulty dealing with an incident or when the nature of the incident suggests that a debriefing might be useful. Some of the key indicators of the need for outside help include change in behaviors such as sleep patterns, eating habits, work habits, punctuality, mood swings, depression, and anxiety, and continuation of stress symptoms in the first 48 - 72 hours or overwhelming stress symptoms in the first 24 - 48 hours. Although the team usually works with a group, if only one person on a shift is having problems, the team can still be called to assist the individual on a one to one basis. *The CISM team is there to help you and other emergency services personnel who are experiencing normal symptoms of stress brought on by normal reactions to abnormal situations or events.*

SELF-CARE TIPS FOR EMERGENCY AND DISASTER RESPONSE WORKERS

Individual Approaches for Stress Prevention and Management:

1. Manage workload.
 - Set priority levels for tasks with a realistic work plan.
 - Delegate existing workloads so workers are not attempting disaster response in addition to their usual jobs.
2. Balance lifestyle.
 - Get physical exercise and stretch muscles when possible.
 - Eat nutritiously and avoid excessive junk food, caffeine, alcohol, or tobacco.
 - Get adequate sleep and rest, especially on longer assignments.
 - Maintain contact and connection with primary social supports.
3. Apply stress reduction techniques.
 - Reduce physical tension by conducting such activities as taking deep breaths, meditating, and walking mindfully.
 - Use time off for exercise, reading, listening to music, taking a bath, talking to family, or getting a special meal.
 - Talk about emotions and reactions with coworkers during appropriate times.
4. Practice self-awareness.
 - Learn to recognize and heed early warning signs for stress reactions.
 - Accept that you may need help to assess problematic stress reactions.
 - Avoid overly identifying with survivors'/victims' grief and trauma, which may interfere with discussing painful material.
 - Understand differences between professional helping relationships and friendships.
 - Examine personal prejudices and cultural stereotypes.
 - Be mindful that vicarious traumatization or compassion fatigue may develop.
 - Recognize when a personal disaster experience or loss interferes with effectiveness.

Normal Reactions to a Disaster Event:

- No one who responds to a mass casualty event is untouched by it.
- Profound sadness, grief, and anger are normal reactions to an abnormal event.
- You may not want to leave the scene until the work is finished.
- You will likely try to override stress and fatigue with dedication and commitment.
- You may deny the need for rest and recovery time.

Signs That You May Need Stress Management Assistance:

- Difficulty communicating thoughts
- Difficulty remembering instructions
- Difficulty maintaining balance
- Uncharacteristically argumentative
- Difficulty making decisions
- Limited attention span
- Unnecessary risk-taking
- Tremors/headaches/nausea
- Tunnel vision/muffled hearing

Signs That You May Need Stress Management Assistance (Continued):

- Colds or flu-like symptoms.
- Disorientation or confusion
- Difficulty concentrating
- Loss of objectivity
- Easily frustrated
- Unable to engage in problem-solving
- Unable to let down when off duty
- Refusal to follow orders
- Refusal to leave the scene
- Increased use of drugs/alcohol
- Unusual clumsiness

Ways to Help Manage Your Stress:

- Limit on-duty work hours to no more than 12 hours per day
- Make work rotations from high stress to lower stress functions
- Make work rotations from the scene to routine assignments, as practicable
- Use counseling assistance programs available through your agency
- Drink plenty of water and eat healthy snacks like fresh fruit and whole grain breads and other energy foods at the scene
- Take frequent, brief breaks from the scene as practicable.
- Talk about your emotions to process have seen and done
- Stay in touch with your family and friends
- Participate in memorials, rituals, and use of symbols as a way to express feelings
- Pair up with a responder so that you may monitor one another's stress

**For additional support or information, please
contact the following number 252.230.1676.**

Acknowledgement: <http://mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/ken-01-0098/> and the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation.