



CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT INFORMATION

Contact:



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Critical Incident Stress

You have been involved in a significant or critical event. Even though the event may be over, you may be experiencing, or may experience later, some strong emotional or physical reactions. It is very common, in fact quite normal, for people to experience emotional aftershocks, or critical incident stress, following such an incident.

Critical incident stress is the physical, mental, and emotional reactions that go along with living and working day to day in the midst of pain, chaos, filth, and loss. No matter how well-trained, conditioned, or streetwise we may be, it is hard to escape this kind of wear and tear.

Critical incident stress may appear immediately after the event, a few hours, or a few days later.

A NORMAL REACTION...
OF NORMAL PEOPLE...
TO AN ABNORMAL EVENT...

What is a traumatic event or critical incident? Any incident which causes us to experience unusually strong emotional reactions which interfere with our ability to function, either at the scene or later.

Critical incidents may include, but are not limited to, incidents of serious threat to significant others or to self, line of duty death or injury, multiple homicides, injury or death of a child, multiple injury/fatality accidents, and community wide disasters such as floods, hurricanes, or fires.

Incidents or situations do not have to be major disasters to cause stress. Cumulative stress ("Burnout") is often a mix of home and work stress, building up over time, which eventually erodes personal resources.

Signs & Symptoms of Stress

Common signs and symptoms of a stress reaction are listed below. These may last a few days, a few weeks, or a few months depending on the severity of the event.

Physical

fatigue
nausea
muscle tremors
chest pain
difficulty breathing
elevated BP
rapid heart rate
weakness
headaches
visual problems

Thinking

confusion
poor attention
poor decision making
altered alertness
poor concentration
hypervigilance
poor problem solving
nightmares
intrusive images

Relational

isolated
resentful
lonely
lack of intimacy
lashing out
social withdrawal
intolerant of others
nagging

Emotional

anxiety
guilt
grief
denial
fear
uncertainty
depression
intense anger
irritability

Behavioral

change in:
communication
sleep
appetite
alcohol use
suspiciousness
withdrawal
emotional outbursts
antisocial acts

Things to try

Talk to people - talking is very healing

Reach out - people do care!

Maintain as normal a schedule as possible

Avoid using alcohol to relax

Do things you enjoy doing

Avoid making major life changes or decisions

Get plenty of rest

Eat well-balanced and regular meals

Exercise to reduce physical stress

Share this information with your significant others

For Family Members & Friends

Listen carefully

Spend time with the person affected

Offer your attention and listening ear

Reassure them that they are safe

Give them opportunities for private time

Don't take their anger or other feelings personally

Familiarize yourself with signs and symptoms of stress and it's impact on families

Critical Incident Stress Management

Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) is a comprehensive approach to traumatic stress management. It encompasses a wide range of programs and intervention strategies designed to manage stress in emergency service personnel and to assist them in managing and recovering from the significant stress they encounter in their daily work.

CISM includes pre-incident education, significant other support programs, defusings, debriefings, on-scene support services, follow-up services, individual consults, peer support, informal discussions, and crisis intervention training.

Critical Incident Stress Debriefing

A Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) is a structured group meeting or discussion in which personnel are given the opportunity to discuss their thoughts and reactions about a significant or traumatic event in a confidential, structured format.

Based upon core principles of crisis intervention and education, a CISD is designed to mitigate the impact of a critical incident and to assist personnel in recovering as quickly as possible from the stress associated with the event.

A CISD is conducted by a specially trained team composed of peer support personnel from the emergency services and mental health professionals. A CISD is not psychotherapy nor is it a substitute for therapy.

Stress Management

Stress management is an ongoing process of dealing with the stress in our everyday lives. It involves making thoughtful choices about your stress: what to keep and what to let go.

Experienced personnel know that emergency service can take its toll on health, marriages, families, and careers. Stress may result in careless, or even fatal, errors or feelings of numbness, isolation, burn-out, and anger.

You can learn how to manage your stress and enhance your wellness. Components of an effective stress management program include good nutrition, proper exercise, effective relaxation, and maintaining your perspective.

**TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF
SO YOU CAN
TAKE CARE OF THE JOB.**

Available Resources

Contact Dr. Clark, WSP Department Psychologist, for more information on developing a personal stress management program or to discuss CISM.

The WSP Peer Support Team is designed to complement the services provided by the Department Psychologist. Peer support provides a way to "talk-out" problems with specially trained coworkers who understand and want to help. Peer supporters use active listening skills, help clarify issues and explore options, support a person through their problem-solving process, and refer to appropriate professionals as needed.

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