

---

# **CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT**

**PARTICIPANT HANDOUT**

Version 01.26

# **CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Tragedies, deaths, serious hostage situations, threatening situations- these events are known as "critical Incidents." People who respond to emergencies encounter highly stressful events almost every day. Sometimes an event is so traumatic or overwhelming that emergency responders may experience significant stress reactions.

Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) is an intervention protocol developed specifically for dealing with traumatic events. It is a formal, structured and professionally recognized process for helping those involved in a critical incident to share their experiences, vent emotions, learn about stress reactions and symptoms and given referral for further help if required. It is not psychotherapy.

One on one and group sessions are confidential, voluntary and supportive, sometimes called 'psychological first aid'. All sessions are facilitated by professional peers. Sessions are not "hot washes, after action or thorns and roses" that point out gaps or points fingers at others, but instead a place that participants can discuss how they feel related to the event or situation that triggered their thoughts and stress.

First developed for use with military combat veterans and then civilian first responders, it has now been adapted and used virtually everywhere there is a need to address traumatic impact in people's lives.

One other form of critical incident stress intervention is peer support. Your peers take training that helps them understand problems that may present after critical incidents and daily activities that may accumulate or compound over time and identify them with their peers. This process also helps people prepare to continue to perform their services or in some cases return to a normal lifestyle.

## SIGNS & SYMPTOMS OF CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS

<i>Physical*</i>	Cognitive	Emotional	Behavioral
chills	confusion	fear	withdrawal
thirst	nightmares	guilt	antisocial acts
fatigue	uncertainty	grief	inability to rest
nausea	hypervigilance	panic	intensified pacing
Fainting	suspiciousness	denial	erratic movements
twitches	intrusive images	anxiety	change in social activity
vomiting	blaming someone	agitation	change in speech patterns
dizziness	poor problem solving	irritability	loss of or increase in appetite
weakness	poor abstract thinking	depression	hyperalert to environment
chest pain	poor attention/decisions	intense anger	increased alcohol consumption
headaches	poor concentration/memory, disorientation of time, place or person	apprehension	change in usual communications
elevated BP	difficulty identifying objects or people	emotional shock	
rapid heart rate	heightened or lowered alertness	emotional outburst	
muscle tremors	increased or decreased awareness of surroundings etc.	feeling overwhelmed	
grinding of teeth		loss of emotional control	
shock symptoms		inappropriate emotional response	
visual difficulties			
profuse sweating	*Any of these physical symptoms may indicate the need for medical evaluation. When in doubt, seek medical attention.		
difficulty breathing			

# **COPING WITH CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS**

Things to try help with coping and returning to normal

- WITHIN THE FIRST 24-48 HOURS, periods of appropriate physical exercise alternated with relaxation will alleviate some physical reactions.
- Structure your time - keep busy.
- You're normal and having normal reactions- don't label yourself crazy. Talk to people - talk is the most healing medicine.
- Be aware of numbing the pain with overuse of drugs or alcohol; you don't need to complicate this with a substance abuse problem.
- Reach out to friends and family - people do care.
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible. Spend time with others.
- Help your co-workers as much as possible by sharing feelings and checking out how they are doing.
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten and share your feelings with others. Keep a journal; write your way through those sleepless hours.
- Do things that feel good to you.
- Realize those around you are also under stress. Don't make any big life changes.
- Do make as many daily decisions as possible which will give you a feeling of control over your life, i.e., if someone asks you what you want to eat - answer them even if you're not sure.
- Get plenty of rest.
- Recurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal - don't try to fight them- they'll decrease over time and become less painful.
- Eat well-balanced and regular meals (even if you don't feel like it).

# **SUICIDE PREVENTION AND CRISIS ASSISTANCE**

Below is a list of resources available to you as one on one options after an event, or whenever you feel they are necessary.

If you are experiencing life threatening situations, call 911 or go to your nearest emergency department.

Available to anyone:

- 988 LIFELINE – Mental health struggles, emotional distress, alcohol or drug use concerns, or just need someone to talk to.
  - Call 988, or visit [988lifeline.org](https://988lifeline.org) for other options and additional information, English / Spanish and Deaf / Hard of Hearing support
- HopeLine NC – 877-235-4525 – [hopeline-nc.org](https://hopeline-nc.org).
- Crisis Text Line, Text HOME to 741741, or visit [crisistextline.org](https://crisistextline.org).

Available to first responders only:

- NC Responder Assistance Initiative – 866-731-6901
- NC Law Enforcement Assistance Program – [NC-Leap.org](https://NC-Leap.org), available to all first responders.
- First Responder Crisis Support – 206-459-3020

Available to Novant Health employees:

- Life Services Employee Assistance Program – 800-822-4847 - [novanthealth.mylifeexpert.com](https://novanthealth.mylifeexpert.com)
- Marvin Behavioral Health – 888-404-1163 - [app.meetmarvin.com/novanthealth](https://app.meetmarvin.com/novanthealth)
- Novant Health Well-Being Hub - [novanthealth.org/team-members/well-being](https://novanthealth.org/team-members/well-being)

## **ASSISTANCE FOR YOUR TEAM / AGENCY, 24 – 48 HOURS**

Southeastern Healthcare Preparedness Region CISM Team based out of Novant Health New Hanover Regional Medical Center, serves first responders and healthcare agencies in the following counties: Bladen, Brunswick, Columbus, Duplin, New Hanover, Onslow, Pender and Robeson Counties. 800-282-5465, Option 6, request CISM team response.

Department and agency leads can request in-person and virtual debrief sessions for their team / agency that will occur within 24 – 48 hours of requests. Requests should be submitted within 24 hours. If you are unsure if a debrief is warranted, initiate the process and we will assist you in making the appropriate choice.

## FOR FAMILY MEMBERS & FRIENDS

What is your loved one or friend experiencing?

- Your loved one is dealing with a stressful situation right now. It is not your fault, even though it may feel like it sometimes. These challenging times can be stressful for spouses, children, parents and significant others.
- Listen carefully. Let them talk if they want, but do not pressure them to talk.
- Spend time with the traumatized person.
- Offer your assistance and a listening ear if they have not asked for help, be careful not to take on their stress as your own. Repeatedly asking them to talk when they don't want to is also not of much benefit.
- Reassure them that they are safe.
- Help them with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking, caring for the family, minding children.
- Give them some private time.
- Don't take their anger or other feelings personally.
- Don't tell them that they are "lucky it wasn't worse"- traumatized people are not consoled by those statements. Instead, tell them that you are sorry such an event has occurred, and you want to understand and assist them (remember some details should not be shared to those outside of the public safety realm, as it could traumatize you as well).

## **TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES**

### **CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT TRAINING**

Classes can be found on NC TERMS: [terms.ncem.gov](https://terms.ncem.gov), search for “Critical Incident Stress Management: Assisting Individuals in Crisis and Group Crisis Intervention”

### **PEER SUPPORT TRAINING**

Offered by the NC Peer Support Team, contact them through their website, [ncfrps.org](https://ncfrps.org) or email, [admin@ncffps.org](mailto:admin@ncffps.org)

Classes may also be found on NC TERMS: [terms.ncem.gov](https://terms.ncem.gov), search for “North Carolina Peer Support Training”

### **CISM TEAM MEMBERSHIP**

If you have the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation GRIN training and wish to participate in the Southeastern Healthcare Preparedness Region’s CISM team in the Wilmington area, please reach out to Hans Edwards at [Hans.Edwards@NovantHealth.org](mailto:Hans.Edwards@NovantHealth.org).