

Critical Incident Stress

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.

The Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) process is specifically designed to prevent or mitigate the development of post-traumatic stress among emergency services and healthcare professionals.

Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) represents an integrated "system" of interventions which is designed to prevent and/or mitigate the adverse psychological reactions that so often accompany emergency services, public safety, and disaster response functions. CISM interventions are especially directed towards the mitigation of post-traumatic stress reactions.

CISM Things to Try

WITHIN THE FIRST 24-48 HOURS periods of appropriate physical exercise, alternated with relaxation will alleviate some of the 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- 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).

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	etc...
rapid heart rate	heightened or lowered alertness	emotional outburst	
muscle tremors	increased or decreased awareness of surroundings	feeling overwhelmed	
grinding of teeth	etc...	loss of emotional control	
shock symptoms		inappropriate emotional response	
visual difficulties		etc...	
profuse sweating		anxiety	
difficulty breathing			
etc....			

****Any of these physical symptoms may indicate the need for medical evaluation. When in doubt, contact a physician.***

FOR FAMILY MEMBERS & FRIENDS

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, but 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).