

CRITICAL **INCIDENT STRESS**

AN OVERVIEW FOR **THE EMERGENCY** **SERVICES PROVIDER**

*What is it and how you can
be best prepared for it.*

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Did you know?

- ⇒ CISM's roots started in WW I (trauma psychology and human behaviors)
- ⇒ 3/10 Emergency Service workers (Fire, EMS, Police) will burnout in less than 7 years, and 1/10 will commit suicide due to critical incident stress
- ⇒ Less than 1 hour is dedicated to CISM awareness training in most EMS classes
- ⇒ Police officers are 8.6 times more likely to die of suicide than any other means
- ⇒ In 1997, there were 304 acts of terrorism, of which ½ of those acts were directed at US targets

What is a “critical incident?”

- ❖ It’s **any** event outside the usual realm of human experience and is markedly distressing. It overwhelms one’s normal coping capacity.
- ❖ Individuals wholly define “their” own critical incident or event. What may be “OK” to you, may noticeably affect someone else.

Top 10 defined critical incidents:

1. Line of duty death (Is your department ready?)
2. Serious injury in the line of duty
3. Suicide of a peer
4. Pediatric serious injury/illness/death
5. MCI event(s) with high degree of media coverage
6. Incidents with particularly gruesome injuries or deaths
7. Treating someone you know who is seriously ill/injured
8. Civilian injury/death caused by EMS/Fire vehicle MVA
9. Terrorism event
10. **Your own definitions**

POINT OF EXCESSIVE STRESS

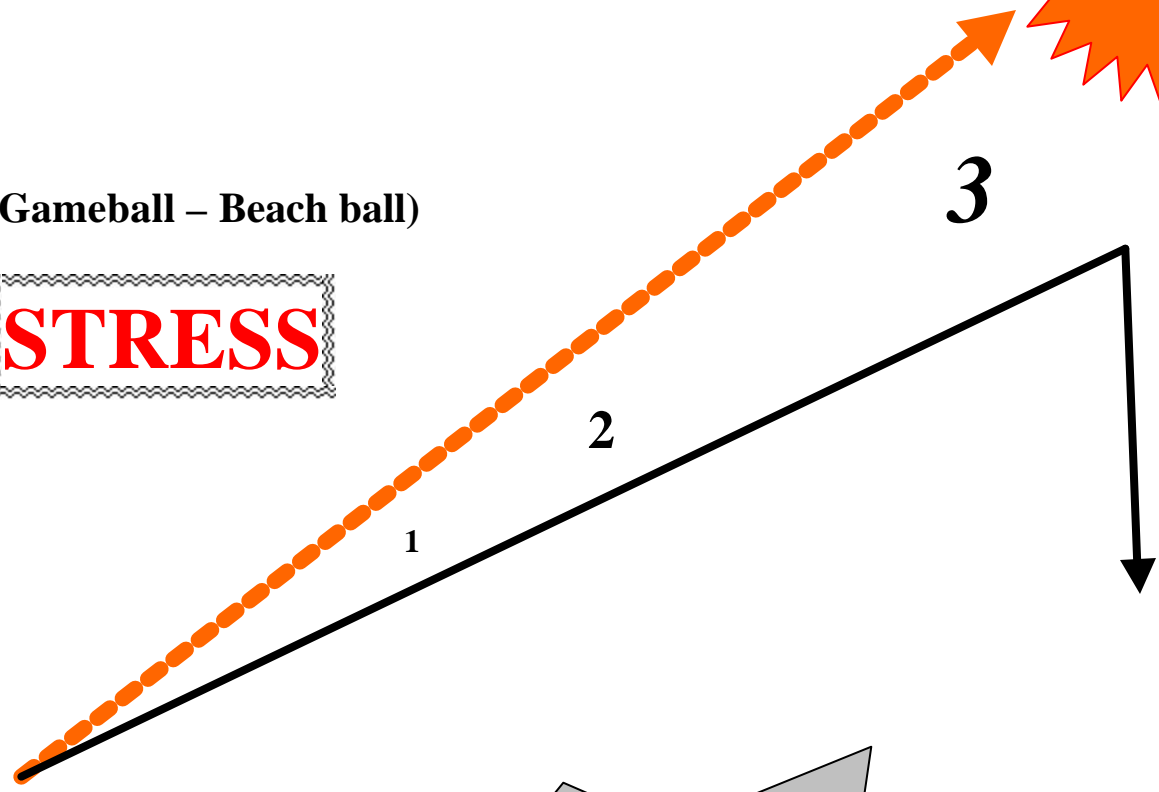
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Critical Incident

(Gameball – Beach ball)

STRESS



PRODUCTIVITY
At Home, At Work, At Life

Response Sequence to Disasters

(CISM Pre-education)

Alarm Phase

β

(CISM Pre-education)

Mobilization Phase

β

(Pre-education/Demobilization's)

Action Phase

β

(CISD/CISM)

Letdown Phase

β

(CISD/CISM)

Re-entry

A list of signals of a stress reaction:

Physical*

chills
thirst
fatigue
nausea
fainting
vomiting
dizziness
weakness
headaches
elevated BP
rapid pulse
visual difficulties
difficulty breathing
profuse sweating

Cognitive

confusion
nightmares
uncertainty
hypervigilance
suspiciousness
blaming someone
poor problem solving
poor attention/decisions
poor concentration/memory
disorientation of time, place,
difficulty identifying objects
heightened or lowered alertness
intrusive images

Emotional

fear
guilt
grief
denial
anxiety
irritability
depression
intense anger
apprehension
emotional outbursts
feeling overwhelmed
inappropriate emotional response

Behavioral

withdrawal
antisocial acts
inability to rest
erratic movements
change in social activity
loss or increase in appetite
hyper-alert to environment
increased alcohol consumption
change in usual communications

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

What is Critical Incident Stress Management?

- ✓ CISM is a comprehensive, organized approach for the reduction and control of the harmful aspects of stress in emergency situations. CISM is based in trauma psychology and crisis intervention theory.
- ✓ Pre-education, awareness training, demobilization's, defusings, debriefing's, and follow-up support services.
- ✓ It helps to speed the recovery of **normal** people with **normal** reactions to an **abnormal** event.
- ✓ What it isn't:
 - For only those who “can't take it”
 - A sign of weakness
 - Counseling
 - Psychotherapy

How does a debriefing/defusing work?

- ❖ A process designed to provide **emotional first aid** following a traumatic event or a **sequence** of traumatic events of a “smaller” scale.
- ❖ It utilizes the use of peer (like you) counselors and Mental Health Specialists that have an extensive CISM training/backgrounds and past EMS/Fire field experiences.
- ❖ Includes only those directly involved, no exceptions.
- ❖ Confidential, safe, and non-judgmental setting.
- ❖ Provides an opportunity for venting the trauma (“downloading, letting it out”) and to learn techniques for coping.
- ❖ Provides follow up, and further help as needed
- ❖ Helps to further strengthen social group’s ability to help each other

Some ground rules to expect with defusings and debriefings

- All pagers, radios and phones shut off for the duration of the session
- Those in the defusing/debriefing will be considered “off duty”
- There is no ‘rank’; everybody is on the same level
- Participation is voluntary, but encouraged
- Defusings are about 30 – 45 minutes long
- Debriefings are up to 90 minutes long

What Can You Do to “Survive” a Critical Incident?

A. Keep yourself “able-bodied” by:

- (a) Keeping the gameball in perspective,
balanced and in control
- (b) Be CISM-smart
- (c) Eat well (Sound like your mother?)
- (d) Regular exercise
- (e) Get adequate rest
- (f) BE GOOD TO YOURSELF

It's our responsibility to ourselves, our family and to our patients to remain in the “game” by staying healthy.

Lookout for your partner and other department members. Ask them if you can help or ask if a CISM Team can.

AWARENESS

When was the last time I was completely away from my EMS/Fire duties?

ATTITUDE

EMS/Fire will go on fine, even if I don't respond to each and every call.

ACTION

Turn off your pager, radio, scanner for a day, afternoon or evening on a regular basis.

Remember, to be our best for our corps, we've got to put the "gameball" away from time to time!

CISM Resources

❖ **Monroe County CISM Team**
Rochester, NY 716-442-6810

❖ **International Critical Incident Stress Foundation**

Ellicott City, MD (410) 750-9600
www.icisf.org

❖ **American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress**

Commack, NY (516) 771-8103
www.aaets.org

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