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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Monroe County CISM Team
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**
STRESS

(Gameball – Beach ball)

PRODUCTIVITY
At Home, At Work, At Life

Critical Incident

1
2
3

?
Response Sequence to Disasters

(CISM Pre-education)

Alarm Phase

↓

(CISM Pre-education)

Mobilization Phase

↓

(Pre-education/Demobilization’s)

Action Phase

↓

(CISD/CISM)

Letdown Phase

↓

(CISD/CISM)

Re-entry
A list of signals of a stress reaction:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physical*</th>
<th>Cognitive</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>chills</td>
<td>confusion</td>
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<tr>
<td>thirst</td>
<td>nightmares</td>
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<tr>
<td>fatigue</td>
<td>uncertainty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nausea</td>
<td>hypervigilance</td>
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<tr>
<td>fainting</td>
<td>suspiciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vomiting</td>
<td>blaming someone</td>
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<tr>
<td>dizziness</td>
<td>poor problem solving</td>
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<tr>
<td>weakness</td>
<td>poor attention/decisions</td>
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<tr>
<td>headaches</td>
<td>poor concentration/memory</td>
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<tr>
<td>elevated BP</td>
<td>disorientation of time, place,</td>
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<tr>
<td>rapid pulse</td>
<td>difficulty identifying objects</td>
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<tr>
<td>visual difficulties</td>
<td>heightened or lowered alertness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>difficulty breathing</td>
<td>intrusive images</td>
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<tr>
<td>profuse sweating</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional</th>
<th>Behavioral</th>
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<tr>
<td>fear</td>
<td>withdrawal</td>
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<tr>
<td>guilt</td>
<td>antisocial acts</td>
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<tr>
<td>grief</td>
<td>inability to rest</td>
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<tr>
<td>denial</td>
<td>erratic movements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>anxiety</td>
<td>change in social activity</td>
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<tr>
<td>irritability</td>
<td>loss or increase in appetite</td>
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<tr>
<td>depression</td>
<td>hyper-alert to environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>intense anger</td>
<td>increased alcohol consumption</td>
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<tr>
<td>apprehension</td>
<td>change in usual communications</td>
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<tr>
<td>emotional outbursts</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>feeling overwhelmed</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>inappropriate emotional response</td>
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* 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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