

CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS

SOURCE: CISD

Tragedies, deaths, serious injuries, hostage situations, or hostage 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 migrate the development of post-traumatic stress among emergency services professionals.

Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) represents an integrated "system" of interventions and 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 toward the mitigation of post-traumatic stress reactions.

Recognizing Critical Incident Stress

Critical Incidents may produce a wide range of stress symptoms, which may appear immediately at the scene, a few hours later, or within days of the incident. Stress symptoms usually occur in four different categories:

1. Cognitive (thinking)
2. Physical (body)
3. Emotional (feelings)
4. Behavioural (actions)

The more symptoms experienced, the more powerful the stress reaction. The longer the symptoms persist, the more potential there is for lasting harm. The following is only a sample of stress symptoms-that can-show up after a critical incident.

Cognitive	Emotional
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Poor concentration• Memory problems• Attention span• Difficulty making decisions• Slowed• Problem solving• Difficulties with calculations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Guilt• Grief• Depression• Anxiety/fear• Loss of emotion• Control• Feeling lost/overwhelmed
Physical	Behavioural
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Muscle tremors• Chest Pain• Gastro-Intestinal distress• Difficulty breathing• Headaches• Elevated blood pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Excessive silence• Sleep disturbances• Unusual behaviours• Changes in eating habits• Withdrawal from contact• Changes in work habits• Stress Survival Suggestions

When emergency personnel experience significant stress from a critical incident, the following steps may help to reduce the stress until the incident is over or until a trained CISM team is located.

- Limit exposure to sights, sounds and odors
- Provide an immediate rest break of at least 15 minutes





- 🧠 Have a friend stay with the distressed person
- 🧠 Provide fluids, non-alcoholic and non-caffeinated
- 🧠 Provide foods low in salt, sugar, and fat
- 🧠 Allow the person to talk about the experience
- 🧠 Do not rush the person to return to work
- 🧠 Protect the person from bystanders and the media
- 🧠 Reassure the person that the stress experience is normal
- 🧠 Most people recover very well from stress
- 🧠 Show appreciation for the person's work
- 🧠 Do nothing to embarrass the person
- 🧠 Help the person make decisions

CIS 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 and 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 make you feel good.
- 🧠 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).

For Family Members & Friends

- 🧠 Listen carefully
- 🧠 Spend time with the traumatized person
- 🧠 Offer your assistance and a listening ear if they have not asked for your help.
- 🧠 Reassure them that they are safe.
- 🧠 Help them with everyday tasks like cleaning, cooking, caring for the family and minding the 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 in any way possible.





“Everyone needs a hand to hold onto.”



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*Helping People
Help Themselves*

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