



# B.C. SEARCH & RESCUE ASSOCIATION

## CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

### Critical Incident Stress

Tragedies, deaths, serious injuries, 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 professions.

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.

### 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: Cognitive (thinking), Physical (body), Emotional (feelings) and Behavioral (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.

<b>Cognitive</b> poor concentration, memory problems, poor attention span, difficulty making decisions, slowed problem solving, difficulties with calculations	<b>Physical</b> muscle tremors, chest pain, gastrointestinal distress, difficulty breathing, headaches, elevated blood pressure
<b>Emotional</b> guilt, grief, depression, anxiety/fear, loss of emotional control, feeling lost/overwhelmed	<b>Behavioural</b> excessive silence, sleep disturbances, unusual behaviours, changes in eating habits, withdrawal from contact, changes in work habits



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#### **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