

Critical Incident Stress Awareness

A Rescuer's Silent Injury

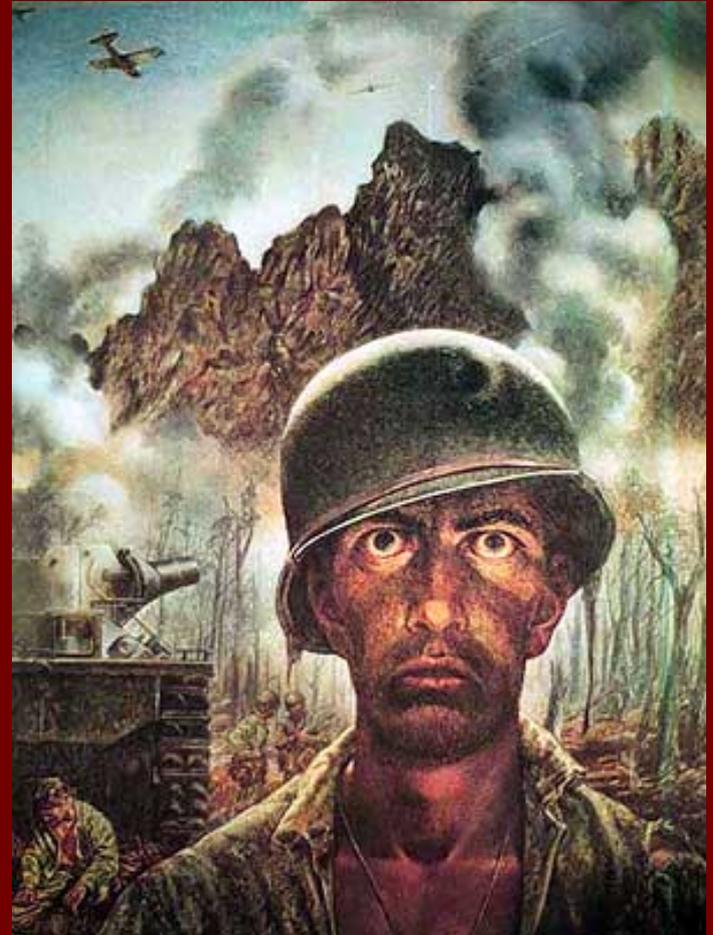
**Thanks to the members of Michigan Task Force 1 for
sharing this program.**

Objectives

- Define the "critical incident."
- Recognize the signs and symptoms of critical incident stress.
- Define Critical Incident Stress Management, its utility and limitations.
- Learn what to expect when attending a defusing or debriefing.
- Learn internal mechanisms to survive an exposure to a critical incident.

Some Background on CISM

- During WWI, the medical community began to recognize a link between the behavior of soldiers and the psychological trauma they encountered.
- Sometimes called "shell shocked"
- Picture by Tom Lea – Life Magazine Journalist accompanying Marines on Peleliu island in WWII – *The Two-Thousand Yard Stare*.



Some Background on CISM



- Formal CISM for emergency service workers has roots in the 1980's.
- 30% Emergency Services workers will burn out in less than 7 years.
- 10% will commit suicide due to critical incident stress.
- Steve Forbes & Robert O'Donnell.

Some Background on CISM

- In the days following the Oklahoma City bombing, Robert O'Donnell voiced the desire to assist with the rescue operations, but could not go.
- He took his own life due to post traumatic stress events that returned to the surface following the OKC bombing.



What is a "Critical Incident?"

- Any event outside the usual realm of human experience that is markedly distressing and exceeds normal coping mechanisms.
- The individual defines what "their" critical incident or event is. An incident that you may be able to easily cope with, noticeably affects another individual.

Critical Incidents

- Line of Duty Death.
- Serious injury in the line of duty.
- Suicide of a peer.
- Serious pediatric illness, injury, or death.
- Multi-casualty event that has a high profile in the media.
- Incidents with particularly gruesome injuries or deaths.

Critical Incidents

- Treating or extricating someone you know that is seriously ill or injured.
- Terrorism.
- You name it.

Physical Symptoms

- Chills
- Thirst
- Fatigue
- Nausea
- Vomiting
- Fainting
- Dizziness
- Weakness
- Headaches
- Elevated B/P
- Rapid Pulse
- Visual Disturbances
- Difficulty Breathing
- Profuse Sweating
- *These may indicate a serious medical condition.*

Cognitive Symptoms

- Confusion
- Nightmares
- Uncertainty
- Hypervigilance
- Suspiciousness
- Blaming someone
- Poor problem solving
- Poor attention
- Poor concentration
- Disorientation
- Difficulty identifying objects
- Heightened or lowered alertness
- Intrusive images

Emotional Symptoms

- Fear
- Guilt
- Grief
- Denial
- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Depression
- Intense anger
- Apprehension
- Emotional outbursts
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Inappropriate emotional response

Behavioral Symptoms

- Withdrawal
- Anti-social acts
- Inability to rest
- Erratic movements
- Change in social activity
- Loss or increase in appetite
- Increased use of alcohol
- Hyper-alert to environment
- Change in usual communications

What is Critical Incident Stress Management?

- It's an organized approach directed at reducing and controlling the harmful effects of stress involving emergent situations.
- It's based in psychology and crisis intervention theory.
- It's education in awareness training, demobilizations, defusings, debriefings, and support services.

What is Critical Incident Stress Management?

- It helps speed the recovery of normal people with normal reactions to abnormal events.
- Layman's terms – Keeps the rescuer's head in the game so they can come back to work tomorrow and continue to be a good rescuer.

Critical Incident Stress Management – What It's Not

- For only those who “can't take it.”
- A sign of weakness.
- Counseling.
- Psychotherapy.
- A critique of the response to the incident.

Defusing and Debriefing

- The “bandage” that stops the psyche from bleeding.
- The emotional first aid following a traumatic event or a sequence of traumatic events of a “smaller” scale.

Defusing and Debriefing

- Defusing – A process immediately post event (12-24 hours), symptom driven, that allows for symptom mitigations, possible closure, and identifying those needing further intervention.
- Debriefing – A process within a day to 4 weeks following an event, depending on the size, that facilitates psychological closure, symptom mitigation and identifying those needing further intervention.

Defusing and Debriefing

- Utilizes peer counselors and mental health specialists that have an extensive CISM background and past EMS/Fire/Rescue experience.
- People that understand where you are coming from.

Defusing and Debriefing

- Without exception, includes only those directly involved in the incident.
- Confidential – no paper, recording devices, etc.
- Safe – allows rescuers to open up.
- Non-judgemental – not a critique of what occurred.

Defusing and Debriefing

- Provides the opportunity to vent the trauma and to learn ways to cope.
- Provides follow up and further help if needed.
- Helps to strengthen the bond of the group and help each other.

Defusing and Debriefing – Ground Rules

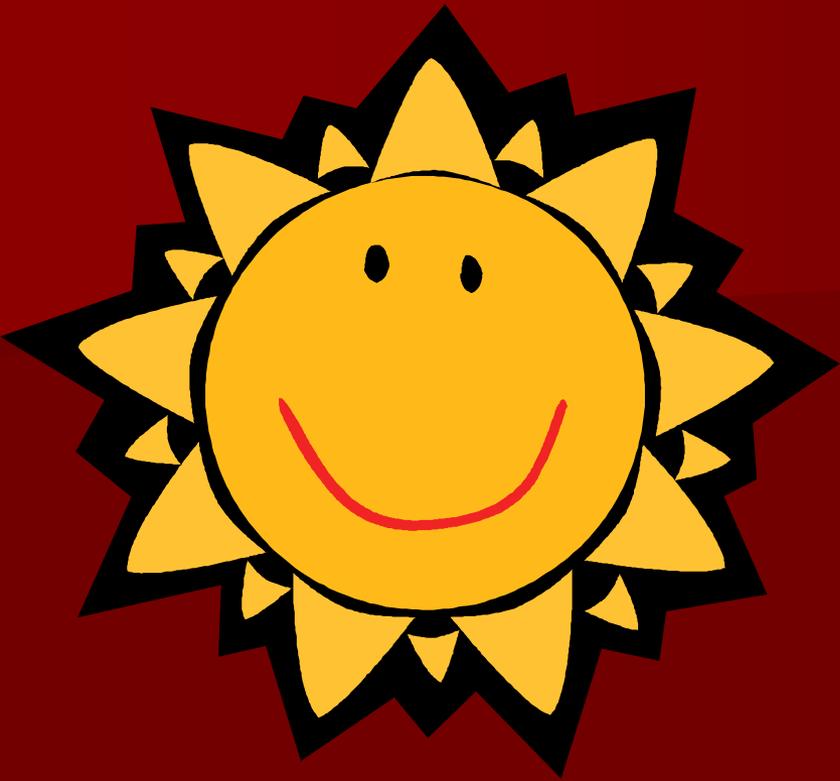
- Pagers, radios and phones off for the duration of the session.
- Those in the session are “off duty” to prevent disruption of the group.
- No “rank” exists – everyone is on the same level.
- Participation is voluntary, but encouraged.
- Defusing lasts about 45 minutes.
- Debriefings last about 90 minutes.

Surviving the Critical Incident

- Do your best to keep work, play, and stress balanced and in control.
- Be aware of critical incident symptoms in yourself and your peers.
- Maintain good nutrition and meal schedules, even when you don't feel like it.
- Exercise
- Rest
- Be good to yourself.

Surviving the Critical Incident

- It is our responsibility to ourselves, our family, and the victims we rescue to remain in the game by staying healthy.
- Look out for your partner and other team members. Ask them if you can help or if they'd like a CISM team.



**This completes the
general training
requirement for Critical
Incident Stress
Awareness**

Click the box below to take a quiz and
receive a Certificate of Completion.

FINAL QUIZ