

# CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT

## PURPOSE

To establish guidelines for dealing with a critical stress incident (e.g., effects on incident personnel).

## PROCEDURE

1. A critical incident is defined as any incident faced by personnel that cause them to experience unusually strong emotional involvement.
2. Examples of a critical incident include
  - A. Serious injury or death of a co-worker.
  - B. Mass casualty incidents.
  - C. Serious injury or death of a civilian resulting from emergency scene operations (e.g., auto accident, etc.).
  - D. Death of a child or violence to a child.
  - E. Suicide of a co-worker.
  - F. Loss of life of a patient following extraordinary and prolonged expenditure of physical and emotional energy during rescue efforts.
  - G. Incidents that attract extremely unusual or critical news media coverage.
  - H. Any incident that is charged with profound emotion.
  - I. Any incident in which the circumstances were so unusual or the sights and sound so distressing as to produce a high level of immediate or delayed emotional reaction.
3. General signs and symptoms to be aware of
  - A. Obvious distress such as crying.
  - B. Shock looking (like a statue).
  - C. Unusual behavior.
  - D. Acting out of character.
4. Immediate care.
  - A. If possible, remove the person from contact with visual, smell, and sounds of the scene for 15-30 minutes; then reassign to a different task.
  - B. If not possible to take out of service, reassign to another task.
5. On-scene protection (minimizing the effects).
  - A. Brief before deployment. Let team members know what to expect.
  - B. Work as a team. Everyone goes in together, everyone comes out together.)
  - C. Limit exposure to the scene. If they don't need to see it, don't let them.
  - D. Establish rest areas away from the scene.
  - E. Avoid high sugar and fatty foods, limit caffeine intake and, if possible, smoking.
  - F. Fifteen minute breaks should be given after every two hours of work.

- G. Six hours maximum should be the limit of time working on a critical incident. After that, personnel should be returned to quarters and given another assignment.

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- The CISM Team may be activated any time it is felt that personnel (including oneself) are being affected by critical incident stress.
- The CISM Team will determine the type of response necessary.

