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Critical Incident Stress Services

R3 Continuum (Crisis Care Network)

American Red Cross (Disaster Services)

Psychological First Aid

Over the past 103 years, the evolution of crisis care and response in the field of Traumatology has been profound. In recent years, the results of trauma research have greatly influenced accepted best practices. This is the most current information available.

Critical incident stress (CIS) happens when an individual or group experiences a traumatic event that causes significant stress reactions. The stress reactions can be physical, cognitive, emotional, behavioral, spiritual, or a combination of the above. The long-term or delayed effects (consequences) of a critical incident are collectively called post-traumatic stress.

Psychological First Aid (PFA) is an approach used to help children, adolescents, adults, families and organizations in the aftermath of trauma, disaster, and terrorism. The goals of Psychological First Aid/Critical Incident Stress Response are to reduce the initial distress caused by a traumatic event, to help people cope, adapt and recover, and to help prevent long-term consequences.

Critical Incident Stress Services (also referred to as critical incident response services) helps people to:

- recover from stress reactions.
- prevent post-traumatic stress reactions.
- address secondary traumatic stress reactions.
- address compassion stress/fatigue.
- prevent burnout.
- return to work and personal-family life.
- develop their own "personal self-care plan."
- focus on post-traumatic growth.

Critical Incident Stress response and Psychological First Aid has replaced the traditional CIS management/debriefing model. Educating professionals who provide emergency services CISR/PFA before a traumatic event occurs has been shown to promote successful recovery.

CISS interventions are not job-related critiques or evaluations.

Trauma Response Has Changed

A new model:

The traditional “debriefing” model (CISM) has been replaced with “Psychological First Aid” (PFA)

Goals of PFA:

- Emphasis on individual recovery
- Normalize stress reactions
- Avoid re-traumatizing individuals
- Prevent long-term consequences
- Provide education about critical incident stress response as part of ongoing training

Continuum of Stress:

- Normal stress- compassion satisfaction
- High stress- secondary traumatic stress
- Compassion stress - compassion fatigue
- Stress overload – burnout

PFA is not:

- Debriefing
- Job related critiques
- Evaluations
- Counseling
- Mental health treatment

Develop a personalized self-care plan:

- Physical exercise
- Sleep and rest
- Healthy diet and liquids
- Reduce violent and toxic stimuli
- Rely on supportive relationships
- When highly stressed take extra care of yourself

Remember:

- Recovery is relative to a decrease in intensity and frequency of reactions over time
- Responding immediately after an incident is often not helpful
- Reduce unnecessary suffering

Normal Trauma Reactions

Trauma affects people physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. Here is a list of common reactions people have to trauma. While they are all normal, the ones listed below should disappear on their own within a few weeks.

PHYSICAL REACTIONS:

- √ Excessive sweating
- √ Dizzy spells
- √ Increased heart rate/breathing rate.
- √ Difficulty breathing
- √ Chest pain or chest discomfort
- √ Muscle tremors
- √ Headaches
- √ Vision problems
- √ Fatigue or exhaustion not related to overwork
- √ Sleep disturbances (sleep too much or not able to sleep enough)
- √ Appetite changes (appetite is either too big or too small)
- √ Increased susceptibility to illness such as colds and flu

MENTAL REACTIONS:

- √ Confused thinking
- √ Difficulty making decisions or solving problems
- √ Disorientation
- √ Nightmares
- √ Higher than usual level of suspiciousness
- √ Intrusive images of the trauma
- √ Poor attention span
- √ Change in level of alertness
- √ Change in awareness of problems or risks.
- √ Feeling "spacey" or out of touch with a person's surroundings
- √ Self-blame
- √ Memory impairment
- √ Disbelief
- √ Denial
- √ Worry
- √ Decreased self-esteem

EMOTIONAL REACTIONS:

- √ Blaming
- √ Fear, panic, anxiety
- √ Shock
- √ Terror

- √ Loss of interest in things that would normally be pleasurable
- √ Emotional numbing
- √ Grief, sadness
- √ Difficulty feeling happy or loved
- √ Guilt that doesn't match the situation
- √ Denial
- √ Agitation, irritability
- √ Depression
- √ Intense anger
- √ Emotional outbursts
- √ Feeling overwhelmed and out of control

BEHAVIORAL REACTIONS:

- √ Becoming withdrawn, alienated from others
- √ Committing antisocial acts--e.g. crimes
- √ Inability to rest
- √ Increased interpersonal conflict
- √ Decreased interpersonal intimacy
- √ Over protectiveness
- √ Feeling abandoned/rejected
- √ Distrust
- √ Diminished work or school performance
- √ Decreased satisfaction with life
- √ Increase in alcohol or other drug use
- √ Aggressiveness
- √ Externalizing blame
- √ Externalizing vulnerability

SPIRITUAL REACTIONS:

- √ are often profound
- √ Loss of meaning and purpose in life
- √ Feeling hopeless and helpless and despairing
- √ Feeling abandoned by God
- √ Losses of a sense of safety or of a predictable future attack the core of people's beliefs

SOURCES: American Red Cross.

Web site address: www.redcross.org

List of normal reactions to trauma from various sources including the American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine

Same Old Story; Take Care of Yourself

Growing Towards Sickness or Health

Top 10

1. Physical exercise and fresh air
2. Adequate sleep and rest (adults 7-9 hours)
3. Learn about a diet of health and moderation
4. Rest and Recuperation (R&R)
5. Reduce violent and toxic stimulus
6. Learn to cope with stress (tolerance frustration)
7. Get enough information before you make important decisions
8. Rely on mutually supportive and positive relationships
9. Limit noise and light pollution
10. When highly stressed take extra care of yourself

Another 10

11. Have a spiritual/religious connection
12. Develop a positive/optimistic attitude about self and life
13. Be aware of positive and negative consequences of medications and drugs
14. Emotional Intelligence (self-awareness)
15. Avoid stressful people and situations
16. Avoid nicotine and excessive caffeine
17. Relaxation based strategies
18. Reduce unnecessary suffering
19. Mindfulness based strategies / meditations
20. General System Theory (everything is interrelated in life)