



MANITOBA CISM NETWORK

AFTER A CRITICAL INCIDENT

Tragedies, deaths, serious injuries, known victims, and threatening situations are a few of the incidents that an emergency services worker can experience, sometimes on a frequent basis. Critical incident stress is the stress typically created by these powerful events (critical incidents) that are outside the usual range of experience of emergency services personnel and overwhelms their ability to cope with the event. It is well known that the stress created by emergency services work (critical incident stress) can have a significant impact on an individual.

Recognising Critical Incident Stress

Critical Incidents may produce a wide range of normal stress reactions, which can appear immediately at the scene, a few hours later or even a few days or weeks after the event. Critical incident stress reactions usually occur in four different areas: cognitive (thinking), emotional (feelings), physical (body) and behavioural (actions).

Over the next few days or weeks you may experience tremors/shakes, stomach aches, nausea, loss of appetite, difficulty sleeping, (physical reactions), have flashbacks or images of the scene in your head, numbness, difficulty concentrating, shock (cognitive reactions), feel overwhelmed by your emotions, feel tense and irritable, anger, sadness, guilt, feelings of “if only” or “I should have” (emotional reactions), restlessness, exaggerated startle responses, isolation and withdrawal, family problems and misunderstandings, excessive use of alcohol/drugs, (behavioural reactions), etc.

What You Can Do About Critical Incident Stress

Sometimes, after a critical incident, we may withdraw from friends or family or take out our frustrations and anger on those who are closest to us or engage in harmful drinking. It is important that we recognise these reactions and help the people close to us understand them as temporary and normal. Otherwise, these situations can be harmful to our relationships and ourselves. Most critical incident stress reactions resolve themselves within 3 to 4 weeks after the incident. Sometimes the memories may last longer but usually the intensity of the reactions will lessen. The more time that passes usually the easier it will become. Many people find talking to someone they trust will also help lessen the reactions. Here are a few things to remember:

Do	Don't
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expect the incident to bother you• Maintain a good diet• Take time for leisure activities & exercise• Remind yourself these reactions are normal• Learn about Critical Incident Stress• Spend time with family, friends and co-workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Drink alcohol excessively• Use legal or illegal substances to numb-out• Withdraw from friends, family & co-workers• Stay away from work• Think that you are “crazy”• Have unrealistic expectations for recovery

Who Can I Contact to Discuss Critical Incident Stress Reactions?

Your local CISM team can help you to learn more about critical incident stress or help you with these reactions through Defusings, Debriefings and other resources. If these reactions persist and are intense please contact someone who you trust and can help you or contact your local CISM team member at:

Or call toll free 1-888-3473 and you will be contacted by your local CISM member.

Please remember that most of these reactions are normal after experiencing an abnormal event!