



Topeka Fire CISM TEAM  
Topeka, Kansas



Office of Fire Chaplains  
Topeka, Kansas

### WHAT IS A CRITICAL INCIDENT?

*"Any event in which there is a stressful impact that is sufficient enough to overwhelm the usually effective coping skills of either an individual or a group."*

(Everly & Mitchell 1999)

### WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW?

**Anyone**, no matter how healthy or well adjusted, who is exposed to a critical incident or trauma, may have reactions to the event. Approximately **80% to 85% of those exposed to a critical incident will have some type of reaction within 24 hours.**

The reaction may NOT necessarily be dysfunctional or disabling. The key is to be aware of the stresses and begin dealing with them appropriately. Even 'normal' reactions can benefit from CISM Team assistance.

### HOW COULD IT AFFECT ME?

It **WILL** affect you. Everybody responds to trauma in his or her own way. Some reactions are normal, some are extreme. Everybody is different.

Variables that affect all of us include:

- Our support or lack of support
- The extent of the trauma
- Our prior exposure to trauma
- How we processed prior traumas
- How much the current incident reminded us of past personal issues.

These variables coupled with the current event **and** our current life stressors all have a bearing on our reactions.

### WHAT KIND OF REACTIONS?

#### **Physical**

fatigue, nausea, muscle tremors, chest pain, difficulty breathing, elevated BP, rapid heart rate, headaches, visual problems

#### **Thinking**

confusion, decreased problem solving, altered alertness, intrusive images, nightmares

#### **Emotional**

anxiety, guilt, grief, denial, fear, uncertainty, depression, intense anger, irritability

#### **Relational**

isolated, resentful, lonely, lack of intimacy, lashing out, social withdrawal, intolerant of others, nagging

#### **Behavioral**

change in sleep, appetite, alcohol use, suspiciousness, emotional outbursts, antisocial acts

## WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT THIS?

While it is true that some people can work through critical incidents on their own with previously learned coping mechanisms, research has proven that ***healing and recovery is much more rapid when it is processed in a group or with another person who has had a similar experience.***

The processes of critical incident stress management (CISM), whether one- to-one or in a group, is a ***private conversation*** about the critical incident. Specific details do ***not*** have to be relived. Discussion of how the incident does or does not fit with your world view may help alleviate psychological tension. CISM is ***not*** an operational critique to assign blame or criticize. Personal records are ***not*** kept. CISM is ***not psychotherapy***—nor a substitute for it.

## CAN I DO THIS ON MY OWN?

It's possible but not nearly as effective. Through the CISM team, we can teach you techniques to help this process. This includes:

- Eat nutritiously.
- Exercise regularly
- Keep a regular sleep schedule.
- Enjoy life outside of work.
- Give yourself time.
- Spend time with others.

**If you do experience uncomfortable reactions, contact a CISM team member.**

## OTHER TECHNIQUES WE TEACH

- Deep breathing exercises.
- How to develop support mechanisms.
- How to structure your time.

## THE GOAL OF CISM

Our ultimate goal is to ***help you deal with the trauma*** in the most helpful way possible so that you can ***get back to your normal routine.***

We do this so that we can mitigate the stress of an incident, to lower overall tension in your life, and accelerate the healing process.

## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **Q. Can I talk about issues other than work?**

**A.** Yes. We know that job stress, family problems, relationship issues, personal problems, etc., may all have a negative impact on your health and well-being. We don't limit what issues can be discussed.

### **Q. How do I know I can trust that my issues will remain confidential?**

**A.** Respecting confidentiality is one of the fundamental principles of our team. Any violations of confidentiality (except issues required by KS state law) will result in removal from the Team. Plus we have many volunteer chaplains and counselors that have no connection to the City of Topeka.

### **Q. Will my supervisor or others find out what I told the CISM Team member?**

**A.** Under almost all circumstances, **no**. KS law and CISM guidelines are very strict about maintaining confidentiality. The only time a CISM Team member will tell anyone what you have told them is when they are required to do so by state law. That law applies to the following circumstances: danger to self or others and the mandated reporting of abuse of children or vulnerable adults.

### **Q. What if I want more "professional" help? Can you provide a referral service?**

**A.** Absolutely. We have a list of professionals that we can refer you to for further help.

### **Q. How do I start this process? Who do I need to call first?**

**A.** You can either call or email anyone on the list below. They can walk you through the rest of the process from there.

## **STRESS MANAGEMENT**

Stress management is an ongoing process of dealing with the stress of our everyday lives. It involves making thoughtful choices about your stress: what to keep and what to let go.

Experienced personnel know that emergency service can take its toll on health, marriages, families, and careers. Stress may result in careless or even fatal errors or feelings of numbness, isolation, burn-out, and anger.

You can learn how to manage your stress and enhance your wellness. Components of an effective stress management program include good nutrition, proper exercise, effective relaxation, and maintaining your perspective.

The TFD CISM Team is comprised of trained professionals who can help with managing your stress. All it takes is an email or phone call.

## **CONTACT INFO HERE**

### **Leave a contact name and phone number and a team member will return your call**

TDF Office: 785-368-4101

Cell : 785-817-3821

Or

CISM Team Members: [CISM@Topeka.org](mailto:CISM@Topeka.org)

Area Counseling Services and Resources

Valeo Of Topeka: 785-233-1730

24 Hour Crisis Hotline: 785-234-3300

## **WEBSITE INFORMATION**

[www.topeka.org/tfd/cism.shtml](http://www.topeka.org/tfd/cism.shtml)