

Critical Incident Stress Management



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Critical Incidents & Child Welfare

- 83% had been exposed to at least 1 critical incident
- 70% experienced distress as a result
- 46% reported severe distress symptoms

Source: Regehr et. al., 2002

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Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD)

1. Origins
2. Basic Design
3. Benefits & Limitations
4. Individual Counseling
5. Final Thoughts

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I. Military Origins



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Even Tough Guys Need to Talk...

After facing combat, "talk...is the easiest and most effective first step toward re-establishment of a fighting morale."

"Nothing is more [harmful to an officer] than to leave him alone with his thoughts. That holds true also of the men under him. Men need to talk it out..."

Source: Brig. Gen. Marshall, 1947 (in MacDonald, 2003)

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Widespread Popularity...



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II. What is CISD?



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Purpose of CISD...

- Provide opportunities for ventilation of feelings
- Normalize responses to crises
- Educate about psychological reactions & resources

Source: MacDonald, 2003

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CISD is ...

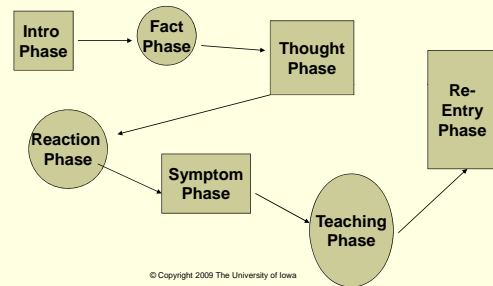
- A group process that follows 7 defined phases
- Used with similar group (e.g., employees of same company who faced a traumatic event)
- Conducted by specially trained facilitators
- Followed up with support & assistance
- Part of broader disaster responses program: pre-incident, on-site support, and debriefing

Source: Adapted from Robinson, 2007

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7 Phases of CISD

(Adapted from MacDonald, 2003)



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III. But Does It Work?

Benefits and Limitations



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Benefits

Child welfare workers indicated that debriefing...

- Greatly reduced stress symptoms
- Promoted coping after the incident
- Contributed to a reduced sense of isolation
- Gave them an opportunity to process the incident

Source: Weuste, 2006

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But There is Another Side!

Cochrane Reports
(1998, 2000, 2002)

Devilley &
Cotton
(2004)

Nehme et al.
(2004)

Devilley et
al. (2006)

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Opponents contend that...

- "...there is no randomized controlled trial evidence to support the validity of group debriefing approaches"
(Devilley et. al., 2003).
- "...the limited data available do not indicate that debriefing prevents psychological distress..."
(Stallard & Salter, 2003).
- "...CISD is ineffective in preventing PTSD"
(Herman, 2005).

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"Fair & Balanced": The Proponents Respond!

- Critics throw "baby out with bathwater"
- Severe methodological flaws in studies
- Statistical significance v. clinical significance
- Short-term benefits clear
- CISD designed as only 1 component of broader program (CISM)

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IV. Individual Counseling



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Individual Debriefing/Counseling

- Short-term (3-5 sessions)
- Coping & adjustment (not reliving, reopening)
- Expression, normalization, & enhanced coping
- Normal temporary reaction to an abnormal event
- Self-care techniques
- If symptoms persist, seek additional counseling.

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V. Final Thoughts



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