

Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) (J.T. Mitchell, G.S. Everly) Information Sheet

Stress is a normal part of every significant job. At different times during your career your level of stress may reach a significant, or critical point. An **acute stress** reaction is frequently related to a specific unusual event/situation.

A **delayed** reaction may happen days, weeks or years after an event. This typically occurs after you are re-exposed or triggered by a similar sight, sound, smell, taste, touch, situation etc.

Cumulative stress is the buildup of stress over time, and/or when you are experiencing significant amounts of stress simultaneously in your life. This buildup may eventually reach a critical mass resulting in a stress reaction.

A stress reaction is an important signal – it is your body’s way of coping with the temporary state of being overwhelmed by a situation. The duration of the symptoms (hours, days, weeks, months) depends on your personal circumstances. However, once properly addressed, most acute stress reactions will significantly lessen within 24-72 hours and a thoughtful combination of stress management strategies will lessen the impact of most situations.

Potential ways to reduce a Stress Reaction:

- Remember, you are a **normal** person, having **normal** reactions to an extremely difficult situation.
- Four natural physiological stress relievers are: **Laughing, crying, exercise and touch**. The more you can include these in your life, the greater the potential for reduced stress levels.
- Include periods of strenuous physical exercise alternating with relaxation to alleviate some of the physical stress reactions.
- Drink lots of water.
- Eat regular meals (even if you do not feel like it).
- Get plenty of rest.
- Be aware of wanting to alter yourself with caffeine, nicotine, drugs or alcohol. These chemicals tend to intensify the physiological stress reactions you are already experiencing.
- Do things that feel good to you: read, write, pray/meditate, listen to music, walk, watch a movie, take a hot shower, get a massage (if possible on board), do progressive relaxation & deep breath exercises etc.
- Talk and spend time with others – many find that talking is the most healing medicine.
- Help your co-workers as much as possible by checking on how they are doing and sharing your thoughts and feelings with them.
- Realize those around you may also be under stress.
- Allow yourself some down-time to just relax and temporarily do nothing.
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible – structure your time and keep busy.
- Make as many daily decisions as possible. That will give you a sense of control over your life (i.e. if someone asks you what you want to eat – give an answer even if you are not sure).
- Recurring thoughts, dreams or flashbacks are normal, typically they are just signals that your body needs to further process the details of the

situation/event. Find constructive ways to understand and integrate these details (talk, write, draw, pray, meditate etc.).

- **If you get „stuck“, consider consulting trained CISM mental health professional (you find the number below*) and/or the physician on board.**

How can I help others

- There is no „right“ thing to say. **Listening** is often the best thing to do.
- Remember the healing process is very dynamic and there is a wide range of normal reactions. Some individuals will want to share specific details, others will prefer a quiet, compassionate presence – most will want a combination of support. Remain flexible to his/her needs rather than „expect“ certain reactions.
- Spend time with the affected individuals - offer your assistance and a listening ear even if he/she has not asked for help.
- Also give him/her some private time.
- Don't take anger or other feelings directed at you personally.
- **Take care of yourself.** You will not be able to help anyone if you do not first care for yourself.

Contact : *Stefanie Lützen: Mail to: stefanie.luetzen@gmx.de Mobile: +49-151-23605602