

Critical Incidents

Work-life challenges come in all shapes and sizes, from minor annoyances to major traumas. Most people handle the full range of challenges and do well over time. However, there are certain types of challenges that can be much more difficult to overcome without some assistance. One type of extreme challenge is called a CRITICAL INCIDENT.

CRITICAL INCIDENT: The World Health Organization (WHO) describes a critical incident as an event out of the range of normal experience – one which is sudden and unexpected, involves the perception of a threat to life and can include elements of physical and emotional loss. Often such events are sufficiently disturbing to overwhelm, or threaten to overwhelm, a person's coping capacity. Most people would be severely shaken by a critical incident but are likely to recover from its impact with appropriate support.

<https://www.workpositive.ie/information/whatarecriticalincidents>

TYPES OF CRITICAL INCIDENTS: Jeffrey Mitchell, in Stress Management (June 2008) listed what he called his "top ten" types of incidents. It is most important to consider #10.

1. Line of duty deaths
2. Suicide of a colleague
3. Serious work-related injury
4. Multi-casualty / disaster / terrorism incidents
5. Events with a high degree of threat to the personnel
6. Significant events involving children
7. Events in which the victim is known to the personnel
8. Events with excessive media interest
9. Events that are prolonged and end with a negative outcome
- 10. Any significantly powerful, overwhelming distressing event**



Critical Incidents are defined by the organization or industry and are peer driven. A critical incident for one company or industry might be different from another industry. Firefighters have different critical incidents than bank tellers. Hospital ER workers have different critical incidents than construction workers. Some professionals, like first responders, face workplace trauma more frequently than the public. Their industry has developed these services and teams that help them respond to these events. But all workers share a vulnerability to certain critical incidents, for example, the unexpected death of a co-worker.

(Continued)

Critical Incidents (continued)

CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS: Feelings and behaviors that are severe reactions to a situation and directly associated with exposure to a critical incident. Reactions to an incident can affect thinking (like problem solving and decision making), the body (like nausea and shaking), emotions (like anger and fear and irritability) and behaviors (avoidance and overuse of drugs/alcohol). The symptoms of critical incident stress can be subtle, overt, complex, and overwhelming.

CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS MANAGEMENT: Sometimes called “psychological first aid,” CISM is an approach with interventions designed specifically for helping those who experience traumatic events. First developed for first responders, this approach has been adapted and used worldwide, including in workplace settings. CISM is not psychotherapy but is intended to manage the immediate trauma response and reduce distress, using a variety of types of responses, including:

- **Debriefing:** Group meeting facilitated by a trained team (CISD)
- **Defusing:** Shorter, less formal, usually within 12 hours of an event
- **Grief & Loss Session:** Group session to help a team deal with a death
- **Crisis Management Briefing:** Brief messaging to a large group

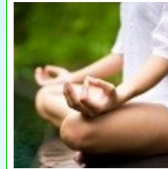
The goal of these services is to help people or teams process their experience from a traumatic incident so they can more quickly return to their daily routine. When people are given a safe place to deal with a trauma or loss without judgment or criticism and receive education and suggestions on how to get through the incident, they tend to do better. (This is a separate process than an operational debriefing or lessons-learned meeting.)

Although we hope these services are never needed in your workplace, your EAP has well-trained and experienced CISM professionals available. Individual support is also always available through your EAP as well!



Articles On Our Website

Did you know about all the resources available to you from your EAP's website? Here are a few examples:



DEVELOPING RESILIENCY

Imagine the last upsetting event that you experienced. What was your reaction to it?

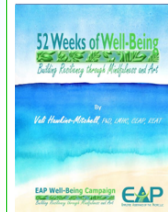
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(If this is a pdf you may be able to click the links to each article above!)

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EAP and PAP provide short-term confidential counseling and work/life services, provided to you by your employer, that can assist in identifying and resolving issues that may be interfering with your job or personal life. Access to our experienced counselors and work/life services is available across the Islands and can be contacted by phoning or emailing our Honolulu office.



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