

Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)

What is a critical incident?

A critical incident is any highly stressful life experience; perceived by the person in the situation. What is perceived as stressful for one person is not necessarily perceived as stressful for another. The key determinant is if the stressor has the power to overwhelm the person's ability to cope. Repetitive incidents are especially draining to an individual's ability to cope.

"Most importantly, critical incidents are determined by how they undermine a person's sense of safety, security, and competency in the world. This results in a form of psychiatric injury, also called traumatic impact or traumatic stress (CSIMI)".

Can incivility and bullying in the workplace lead to critical incident stress?

Yes, incivility and bullying can undermine a person's sense of safety, security, and competence (CSIMI) and impact a person's ability to function effectively at work and at home.

What are the behaviors and symptoms of Critical Incident Stress?

- Sleep disturbances
- Inconsistent or poor job performance
- Poor concentration
- Irritability
- Abrupt outbursts of anger
- Depression
- Substance abuse
- Overeating and undereating
- Putting a negative story to other's actions
- Fatigue
- Increased absenteeism
- Reduced critical thinking ability
- Hyperacute reactions to criticism
- Withdrawal
- Suicidal ideation
- Gastrointestinal disturbance
- Headaches

These symptoms and behaviors are detrimental to building and sustaining an organization's human capital and may contribute to impaired patient outcomes.



How is critical incident stress managed? How can a person reach a place of renewal?

Most authorities recommend prevention as the best place to start; a person can often take care of him/herself when they have strong coping strategies. These strategies include:

- Daily exercise
- Balanced diet
- Hobbies and sports
- Network of friends outside of work
- Balanced work-life activities
- Relaxation techniques

Key to any organization's ability to prevent and reduce stress in its workforce is to provide staff with programs and resources to address stress and to identify and remove the inciting stressor, in this case incivility and bullying, from occurring. Below are several resources that you may find useful to managing critical incident stress in your organization.

Resources

Critical Incident Stress Management International (CISMI)

<http://www.criticalincidentstress.com>

Everly, Jr., G.S., & Mitchell, J.T. (1997). *Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)*. A new era and standard of crisis management. Ellicot City, MD: Chevron Pub.

International Critical Incident Stress Foundation

<http://www.icisf.org/education-a-training/course-descriptions/896-advanced-individual-crisis-intervention-and-peer-support>

Occupational & Health Administration (OSHA) - Critical Incident Stress Guide

<https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/emergencypreparedness/guides/critical.htm>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

Federal Occupational Health – Critical Incident Stress Management

<http://www.foh.dhhs.gov/NYCU/CISMInfo.as>

