

# Critical Incident Stress Debriefing

CISD: The Basics and Accompanying Group Work

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## Definition

- ▶ A structured experience to discuss any highly stressful event.
  - 7 phases
  - Provided 2-10 days past the crisis event (preferably around 72 hours)
  - Designed to
    - diminish serious symptoms of acute stress
    - Assess need for follow-up
    - Potentially provide closure

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## Possible Venues for Delivery

- ▶ Individual: Each individual who experienced the traumatic event is debriefed in private by one paracounselor
- ▶ Small group: A group of 5-15 who experienced the event are debriefed together

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### Individual:

- ▶ Advantages
  - Overcomes some of the problems intrinsic to group debriefing (trust, intrinsic negative group dynamics, imbalance in participation, potential failure to notice traumatic symptoms)
- ▶ Disadvantages
  - Inefficient for large scale debriefing
  - No present therapeutic observation team

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### Small group

- ▶ Advantages
  - Efficient to numbers
  - Provides more than one set of eyes
- ▶ Disadvantages
  - Need group facilitation skills to be effective
  - Research has shown that reliability is low with classic Critical Incident Stress Debriefing

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### Sequence of CISD

1. Introduction: setting the stage, discussing rules, encouraging participation
2. Facts phase: Exploring facts, personal experience of and information related to the traumatic event
3. Thought phase: first thoughts, main thoughts during the incident
4. Reaction phase: what was the worst element of the situation
5. Symptom phase: divulging distress symptoms, emotions, responses during the incident and after
6. Teaching phase: information, suggestions to reduce impact of stress
7. Re-entry phase: answering questions, summarizing session.

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### Introduction

- ▶ Intention
  - Establish atmosphere
  - Build trust
  - Develop structure
- ▶ Setting the stage
  - Discuss the process of debriefing and why it occurs, what it's expected effects are, and its limitations, what will happen when
- ▶ Set ground rules:
  - Confidential, respectful communication (emotional safety)
    - With overlay of Process Debriefing this issue becomes less likely to have to deal with, as respect is built, not directed.
  - Closed meeting after beginning (stability, group process)
  - Discuss norms of participation

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### Facts Phase

- ▶ Intention
  - In general: to provide opportunity to recount client perspective on critical event and set stage for psychological debrief
  - In group: create a common understanding of the critical event
- ▶ Important issue: Men need more time in this phase before moving to more emotional material to build trust and mutuality
- ▶ Possible questions
  - What were you doing when ... occurred?
  - Share with the group what happened in the situation from your point of view.

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### Thought phase

- ▶ Intent
  - Develop mutuality, understanding of other members
- ▶ Share with the rest of us what you were thinking as this was all going on.
- ▶ What kind of decisions did you make in those moments?

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### Reaction phase

- ▶ Intent
  - Reduce tension, mobilize team support/unity, prevent rumination, decrease personalization of event, normalize response
- ▶ Share with the group what were some of the worst things for you personally about the situation you experienced

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### Symptom phase

- ▶ Intent
  - Discover need to coping mechanisms and support systems, normalize experience further, prevent avoidance
- ▶ What kinds of personal issue have been the result of you experience?
- ▶ Share with us what kinds of emotions, physical symptoms, response behaviors, or changes in the way you think have begun to occur because of the seriousness of the situation you experienced.

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### Teaching phase

- ▶ Intent
  - Normalization of experiences by leaders, providing frame of reference, decreasing "activation", information/resources
- ▶ Debrief(er)s provide information about participant reactions and provide stress management information. Information should fit group member issues
- ▶ Discuss stress reduction resources, strategies, and techniques
  - Breathing and progressive relaxation
  - Meditation
  - Exercise
  - Support group/Counseling/family support
  - Intrusive material control techniques/in vivo exposure
  - Self talk

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### Re-entry phase

- ▶ Intent
  - Secure future coping, resources. Avenue to further help
- ▶ Lesson learned
- ▶ Questions and closure statements
- ▶ Requests for resources entertained
- ▶ Final directives from debriefers
- ▶ Handouts as appropriate

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### Follow up

- ▶ Refreshments help keep group members available for beginning of follow-up services and “seal” paracounsellor/client connection
- ▶ One on one sessions as appropriate
- ▶ Follow-up supervision with supervisors
- ▶ Reports
- ▶ Concerns about particular members discussed and referrals made to counsellors.

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