

# FELTON FIRE PROTECTION DISTRICT

## STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES

ARTICLE: I

SOP: 1106

SECTION: 1100 PERSONNEL

SUBJECT: Critical Incident Stress Debriefing

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this procedure is to provide guidelines to professional intervention (immediately) after major incidents in order to minimize stress-related injury to all personnel.

**SCOPE:** Case studies of major incidents, where numerous injuries or fatalities occurred, have revealed that a significant number of rescue personnel experienced some form of stress related symptoms following the incident. Many of these symptoms were transitory and most personnel had no long-term effects resulting from exposure to such incidents. Without professional intervention, personnel experiencing these effects show declining performance, deterioration of family relationships, and increased health problems.

**DEFINITION:** Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD) is an organized approach to supporting emergency service personnel who are involved in emergency operations under conditions of extreme stress in order to assist in mitigating long-term emotional trauma syndromes. These critical incidents could be any situation faced by emergency service personnel that cause them to experience unusually strong emotional reactions which have the potential to interfere with their ability to function either at the scene or later.

### PROCEDURE:

There are many methods to deal with a stress response syndrome resulting from exposure to a critical incident. Among them are strenuous exercise and special relaxation programs within 24 hours after the critical incident. However, one of the most effective methods, especially in emergency personnel, is a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD).

A. The task of the CISD team is to provide an organized approach to the management of stress responses for fire fighters having been exposed to, or showing signs of, traumatic stress experienced in the line of duty. When an incident is identified as a critical incident a request for debriefing consideration shall be made to the Fire Chief. The following are examples of incidents that may result in a need for CISD.

1. Major disaster/Mass casualties
2. Serious injury, death, or suicide of a firefighter
3. Death of a child
4. Incidents involving profound emotional responses.
5. Any incident that attracts unusually heavy media attention
6. Accumulating trauma syndromes from long periods of incidents

B. The Critical Incident Stress Debriefing process consists of three basic phases.

1. The first phase of the CISD process consists of initial ventilation of feelings by those involved, and an assessment of the intensity of stress response.
2. The second phase of the process consists of a more detailed discussion of the

signs and symptoms of stress response, and provides for education, support, and reassurance.

3. The final or closure phase of CISD is where information is provided and, if necessary, a plan of further action or referral may be necessary.

#### C. The Critical Incident Stress Debriefing Plan

1. Critical Incident Stress Debriefing must begin with the On-Scene Management. Minimizing personnel exposure to stressful incidents results in fewer stress-related problems. Incident Commanders should reduce this exposure by rotating personnel and by removing initial respondents from the scene as soon as possible.
  - A. When appropriate, personnel should be sensitized to an incident. This means they should be told what they will encounter. Rotation into an area should start with an assignment of lesser impact, then into the main area. Rotation away from an incident should be from the main area to an assignment of lesser impact, then to the rest area.
  - B. On-site evaluation and counseling by a CISD team member should be considered for some critical incidents when time and circumstances permit. In such situations, the debriefing team can observe, watch for acute reactions, provide support, encouragement, consultation, and be available to help resting personnel deal with stress reactions. Team members should be considered as a resource available to command.
2. An initial diffusing may take place shortly after the incident and will be facilitated by the Fire Chief or his/her representative and a licensed counselor. This is an informal process, encouraging an open, free expression of feeling without a critique of the incident or of the individuals responses. This shall provide educational information regarding normal responses to abnormal events.
3. Formal Critical Incident Stress Debriefing. This debriefing shall be led by a licensed counselor and held after the conclusion of the incident. The debriefing shall follow this general format.
  - a. Introductory phase. The Fire Chief or his/her representative shall introduce all persons present, describe the rules of the debriefing, and emphasize the need for confidentiality.
  - b. Fact phase. The counselor will ask participants to describe facts about themselves and their activities during the incident, as well as facts about the incident.
  - c. Feeling phase. When enough information has been provided to make the incident vividly clear, the counselor will encourage a sharing of feeling by participants. the counselor should emphasize that all feelings, positive or negative, important or unimportant, should be expressed and listened to.
  - d. Symptom phase. Each participant is encouraged to describe their own experience with the Stress Response Syndrome.
  - e. Teaching phase. The counselor provides the participants with an education about Stress Response Syndromes, with emphasis on how normal and natural such responses are for emergency service workers.
  - f. The reentry phase. This phase seeks to wrap the debriefing up, answer outstanding questions, and establish a plan of further actions. Summary comments are offered by the counselor, advising personnel on how to seek further help if they need it.

## ACTIVATION/NOTIFICATION

- A. Fire District Officers are responsible for identifying/recognizing significant incidents that may qualify for debriefing. When an incident is identified as a critical incident, a request for debriefing consideration should be made as soon as possible.

Activation may be accomplished in one of the following ways:

1. Any Fire Officer may initiate the debriefing process.
  2. Any fire fighter who feels a need for confidential debriefing shall contact any Fire Officer for proper assistance or referral.
- B. When activated, the incident will be evaluated for the amount of debriefing required. The specific debriefing services utilized will depend greatly upon how early the process is activated, and the nature of the incident.

## RULES DURING DEBRIEFING

- A. All statements, facts, opinions, and discussions made during the diffusing or debriefing process shall be "strictly confidential".
- B. Attendance to a debriefing shall be mandatory for all personnel who were directly exposed to the traumatic aspects of an incident.
- C. No one should be criticized for how they feel. Instead, they should be allowed free expression of feeling with acceptance, support, and understanding from each other.
- D. No recordings, video tapes, or notes are allowed.
- E. Personnel shall not leave the debriefing once in progress.
- F. Critical incident debriefing is not a critique of Fire District operations at the incident.
- G. No media coverage
- H. Debriefing will be held at the fire station. The room used shall be kept private. Debriefing shall not take place at the scene of the incident.

## RESOURCES AVAILABLE:

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Mr. Ron Edeal      662-0742  
Counselor  
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