

Critical Incident Counseling

Critical Incidents

- Officer-involved shootings
- Hostage situations
- Traffic accidents
- Natural disasters
- Crimes
- Abuse
- Near death experiences
- Deaths of family/friends



People Involved

- Police officer/firefighter/EMT/rescue worker
- Victim
- Suspect
- Bystander/witness
- Family of officer
- Family of victim
- Family of suspect
- Jury members



Facts

Kureczka (1996)

- 4-10% of people experiencing a critical incident will develop PTSD
- 25% of victims hurt during a crime will develop PTSD
- Critical incident stress will affect 87% of all emergency services workers at least once in their career
- 70% of police officers who use deadly force leave law enforcement within 5 years



Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Criteria for Diagnosis

Criterion A	Exposure to a trauma
Criterion B	Re-experience the trauma in the form of dreams, flashbacks, intrusive memories, or unrest
Criterion C	Evidence of avoidance behavior, numbing of emotions, reduced interested in others and the outside world
Criterion D	Experience physiological arousal, as evidenced by insomnia, agitation, irritability, or outbursts of rage
Criterion E	The symptoms in B, C, & D persist for at least a month

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

Three Levels of Victimization

- **Critical incident** shatters certain assumptions
 - Loss of invulnerability
 - Loss of a just/orderly world
 - Loss of a positive self-image
- **Secondary Wounding**
 - Others disbelieve, deny, discount effects of the incident
 - Others blame the victim
 - Stigmatization

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Three Levels of Victimization

- **Victim thinking**
 - Intolerance of mistakes
 - Denial of personal difficulties
 - Friends or enemies thinking
 - Continuation of survival tactics



Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Triggers

- Anniversary dates
- Current stresses
- Media
- Conversations
- Other reminders



Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder The Healing Process

- Remembering the trauma and reconstructing it mentally
- Feeling the feelings associated with the trauma
- Empowering oneself to feel like a survivor rather than a victim



Officer Involved Shootings Consequences for the Officer

- 58% heightened sense of danger
- 49% anger
- 46% sleep difficulties
- 45% isolation/withdrawal
- 44% flashbacks/intruding thoughts
- 43% emotional numbing
- 42% depression
- 40% alienation
- 37% guilt or sorrow
- 34% nightmares
- 28% mark of Cain
- 28% problems with authority figures
- 27% family problems
- 23% feelings of insanity or loss of control
- 18% sexual difficulties
- 14% alcohol/drug abuse
- 11% suicidal thoughts

Officer Involved Shootings Treatment Steps (Wagner, 1986)

- Supply a companion
- Remove officer from immediate scene
- Allow officer to call family
- Have authority figure reassure officer
- Provide access to an attorney
- Reissue all equipment (e.g. firearm)
- Control media and explain that officer has no obligation to talk to the press
- Assign unmarked car to officer's home
- Mandatory administrative leave
- Psychological intervention

Officer Involved Shootings Trauma Debriefing

- Allow about 24 hours to pass
- Describe the nature of the trauma program
- Focus the officer on the incident
- Work the officer through the details of the incident
- Shift the focus from the procedural parts of the incident to the emotional parts
- Goal is to get the officer to understand and accept the incident


