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

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criterion A</th>
<th>Exposure to a trauma</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Criterion B</td>
<td>Re-experience the trauma in the form of dreams, flashbacks, intrusive memories, or unrest</td>
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<td>Criterion C</td>
<td>Evidence of avoidance behavior, numbing of emotions, reduced interest in others and the outside world</td>
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<tr>
<td>Criterion D</td>
<td>Experience physiological arousal, as evidenced by insomnia, agitation, irritability, or outbursts of rage</td>
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<td>Criterion E</td>
<td>The symptoms in B, C, &amp; D persist for at least a month</td>
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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 disbelief, 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

**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

**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