

Tidewater EMS Council
*Critical Incident Stress
Management Team*

1104 Madison Plaza, Suite 101

Chesapeake, VA 23320



If you are a first responder we would first like to say thank you. Thank you for giving of your time, your patience, your skill, and your dedication to serving your community. We would also like to talk with you about one of the many challenges of being a first responder: dealing with intrusive thoughts and images.

*“I can’t get that incident
out of my head”*

It’s the face you keep seeing... the nightmare that disrupts your sleep...

the baby you couldn’t save... the continual thoughts of what you could have done differently. All of these are all examples of intrusive images. And they’re normal reactions to an abnormal event; they are part of the human defense mechanism.

*Intrusive images
come in many forms.*

These images are often intense and clear and can come in the form of flashbacks, sensory disturbances, nightmares, or unwanted thoughts. No matter how they come, they cause a person to re-experience the critical incident. They are not a rare occurrence; many if not most first responders will experience intrusive thoughts and images at some point in their career.



But why do they occur?

You need first to understand the dynamics associated with a critical incident. A critical incident is a **traumatic** event that is outside normal human experience and causes unusually strong emotional reactions. As a first responder these traumatic events are a part of our daily tasks; therefore our reactions are often delayed. It may be a

few days or even a few weeks later when suddenly these reactions hit us in the form of intrusive images.

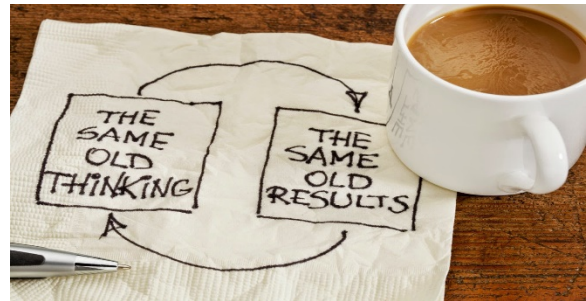


Three things you can do to ease the intrusive images...

Talk about the incident, your responses during the incident, and your reactions since the incident. Talk with peers, friends, family, CISM Team members, and/or mental health professionals. Talking will allow you to explore coping mechanisms; it will allow facts to be fully processed; it will help to normalize individual responses and possibly offer healthier ways of coping.

Use relaxation, guided imagery, and/or positive self-talk. These important techniques will assist with allowing the event to be reviewed with decreased anxiety, enabling complete processing of the trauma. One technique is to replace the intrusive image with an image that has positive connotations. Using these forms of

relaxation, guided imagery, and self-talk will promote complete processing by the mind; when that happens, the memory no longer remains “stuck.”



Always incorporate appropriate nutrition and adequate sleep into your life. Proper food and sleep will aid in the reduction of many symptoms associated with a critical incident

Please visit our website for a more detailed brochure and other helpful resources. Remember, you are not alone.

For more information and/or help with a referral for professional assistance, contact the Tidewater CISM Team.

**How to access services from
TEMS CISM Team**

General Information
757-414-CISM (2476)

Request for Service:
757-414-2476

On the Web:
www.tidewaterems.org
Click CISM on the left menu