

Four:

See the event as a call to action...

And do something about it. I've seen firefighters mobilized by a tragic death ensure that every house in their community had a working smoke detector. I've seen Coast Guard personnel take it upon themselves to teach every boater they come across about the value of wearing a proper personal flotation device. Sometimes the call for action is within your personal life. After a particularly impactful drowning case, I decided that my sons would learn to swim; they started lessons at the YMCA within days.

Your call for action will be personal; it will be that thing that you can do to make good come from the traumatic event.

Tidewater EMS Council
Critical Incident Stress
Management Team
1104 Madison Plaza–Suite 101
Chesapeake, VA 23320

This brochure provides a basic overview about how to cope with stress from a critical incident. The material here is just basic information, and the tips presented here are just suggestions. If you find they do not help, seek a professional trained in helping people who have experienced a critical incident. You do not have to deal alone with the after-effects of a critical incident.

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



**How to access services from
the Tidewater EMS Council
CISM Team**

General Information:
757-963-0632

Request for Service:
(757) 414 CISM
(757) 414 2476

On the Web:
www.tidewaterems.org/cism

***Four things
you can do
to alleviate stress reactions...***

Often, people who have experienced a traumatic event are wrapped in anger, lethargy, and fear. They are angry over the event. They can't seem to find the energy to do anything. They fear that the thing that sends them to this awful place will find them again. And these are just three possible reactions to a critical incident.

Well, the good news is that these reactions are completely normal. The even better news is that there is a way to move beyond all these reactions...

Read on for four things you can do to alleviate the stress reactions you might be experiencing...

So that others may serve

One:

Talk to someone about the event...

First, let me suggest that if you have experienced a critical incident, seek out someone with whom you can talk. I suggest someone on the critical incident stress management team or a professional counselor, psychologist, or clinical social worker. Why do I suggest this? Well, someone who is trained in CISM – either a peer or mental health professional – can offer healthy coping mechanisms. And healthy coping mechanisms – rather than unhealthy ones such as self-medicating, or eating too much, or yelling at your spouse – is what you need.

But, if you're like most of us, you probably think you can handle this on your own. Certainly, the first time I faced a critical incident, as a Coast Guard seaman at a search and rescue station in New England, I thought I could handle the reactions on my own. I was "macho," and I didn't want anyone to know that I was hurting.

Let me tell you, I would have been better off if I had at least talked with someone about the incident. Even better would have been participating in a group debriefing or defusing session. After a while, I was able to integrate the incident into my life. I owned it, rather than it owning me.

But the process was disjointed and longer than it needed to be.

Let me offer three things that you can do to integrate into your life whatever critical event you've experienced.

Two:

Reframe the event...

When I say reframe the event, I don't mean go out to Wal Mart and purchase a new frame. No, what I mean is to find new meaning in whatever the event is. All critical incidents have meaning in our lives; that is, in large measure, why the event impacts us. The meaning does not mesh with our view of the world. Children aren't supposed to die. Co-workers aren't supposed to get trapped in burning building. Now, I can't tell you what the meaning of the event ought to be for you, but I can share an example of reframing.

I once heard of a police officer who, in an off-duty status, was mugged. In the scuffle, the perpetrator was able to get the officer's gun and fire. The officer, hit, feigned death. The perpetrator put the gun to the officer's head to finish the job, but seeing the lifeless body, didn't fire. The officer, who experienced traumatic stress from the incident, believed he had failed by not being able to defend himself and apprehend the perpetrator. The new perspective, the reframe, came when the officer realized

that by is training and maturity, he had feigned death, rather than attempting to be a hero (and likely dying) as he would have done in his younger days. He realized that he had "won."

Three:

Replace the "ugly" visions...

Often following a critical incident, we are left with ugly visions and memories -- intrusive images. It's important to replace these images so they don't become ingrained on the mind.

After a SAR case early in my career, I couldn't shake the image of a man we had found, tangled in the wreckage and lines of his totally destroyed 52ft catamaran. I couldn't shake the images. And then, I began to imagine him not as I had seen him, but sailing his then beautiful boat, a wide smile on his face, the sea and sky shining on him: a "happy" image.

Once I worked with a firefighter who couldn't shake the image of a child he'd been unable to save. He attended her funeral and saw her lying, peacefully among flowers of the church. He replaced the "ugly" image he had of her with the new peaceful and restful vision.