

More ideas for healthy coping...

- Relax. Practice meditation.
- Get a regular 8 hours of sleep a night.
- Take time for leisure activities and hobbies.
- Set realistic expectations.
- Don't over-commit at home, at work or in your volunteer life.
- Create a healthy support system.
- Use appropriate humor.
- Take daily vitamin supplements.
- Go for a 30 minute walk every day.
- Cut a cord of wood.
- Talk to an old friend.
- Create order in at least one part of your life... even if it's just a closet.
- Drink lots of water.

This information prepared for emergency services personnel in Hampton Roads by:
Tidewater Critical Incident Stress Management Team
1104 Madison Plaza, Suite 101, Chesapeake, VA 23320
For additional information about critical incident stress management contact
the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (<http://www.icisf.org>)
or the Tidewater CISM Team
(www.tidewaterems.org/cism or email to tidewater@vaems.org).

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Take Care of Yourself: **Suggestions on how to reduce Critical Incident Stress**

Emergency services personnel are faced with unique stressors on a daily basis. Every once in a while, emergency services personnel – police and law enforcement officers, fire fighters, rescue personnel, emergency medical technicians, and military first responders – are faced with “critical incidents.” A critical incident is an event outside the realm of normal human experience.

In order to better deal with a critical incident, you need to be prepared, ahead of time. People who are prepared and who take care of themselves are better able to cope with the stress stemming from a critical incident. This flyer is meant to provide a very basic primer on things you can do to prepare yourself so that, in the unfortunate event you experience a critical incident, you will be able to weather the storm and minimize the impact on your own self, your family & friends, and your co-workers.

The Tidewater Critical Incident Stress Management Team stands ready to help you and all emergency services personnel in southeastern Virginia when it comes to critical incidents and the stress from critical incidents. We are emergency services personnel and mental health providers who are trained in helping people before, during, and after critical incidents.

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

General Information
757-963-0632

Request for Service
757-414 CISM (2476)

On the Web: www.tidewaterems.org/cism

In order to take care of yourself, we recommend that everyone develop and implement a stress management plan – before and after experiencing a critical incident. Your plan should address four cornerstones: physical, emotional/social, mental, and spiritual.

- We all know that we need to take care of ourselves physically. Eating right helps your body deal with stress. Appropriate aerobic exercise combats the negative effects of stress related chemicals in your body.
- The social/emotional component has to do with relationships – relationships with those around us and with ourselves. We don't deal with stress well without a healthy support network of friends, family, and colleagues.
- Keeping the mind sharp by reading and other mental activities helps keep the brain working properly... again, combating the negative aspects of stress.
- People who believe in a higher being, and work on that relationship, are better able to cope with stress reactions. We don't suggest a particular belief system, but encourage everyone to find a belief system which fits; then live in alignment with those beliefs.

**Critical Incident Stress Management Interventions
Offered by the Tidewater CISM Team**

- **Defusing** – Small group intervention for a crew or shift within hours of a critical incident; helps mitigate stress.
- **Critical Incident Stress Debriefing** – Small group sharing & educational session normally 1-3 days following a critical incident.
- **One-on-One** – Individual session between emergency services provider and team peer or mental health provider; provides education & coping.
- **Large incident interventions** – We offer on scene support services (working with emergency services personnel and supervisors/managers during an incident), demobilizations (educational sessions following a shift deployed to a large incident), and crisis management briefings (large information-sharing sessions; usually for the general public following massive events).

Additional Coping Strategies: *Suggestions on ways to beat the stress*

Take time for relaxation and for lunch. This sounds fairly obvious, but the number of people who don't actually block time out for relaxation, and the number of people who don't sit down to a "real" lunch, is just astonishing. Take time out to relax every day, even if it's just 10 minutes of quiet time in the morning.

Take at least two consecutive weeks for vacation. Perhaps you don't think you have the luxury for this, but work toward this. And yes, your job will not fall apart if you take two weeks for yourself.

Take care of your body, through diet and exercise. Another obvious one, but one we often miss. Watch what you eat. Get plenty of appropriate exercise. Even 30-40 minutes of moderate walking four times a week will do wonders for you. The old adage of no pain, no gain, doesn't apply.

Set boundaries between home and work. While it's not always possible, try and keep "home" at home and "work" at work. When you bring "work" home, or "home" to work, you're only adding stress to what is probably already a stressful environment.

Decrease or discontinue caffeine. Caffeine is a great stimulant; your body doesn't need it, particularly when you're faced with a stressful event.

Avoid isolation. Don't just exist in the world. Exist within a community. That community is not just your work place, but also your neighborhood, your place of worship, your volunteer organizations. No person is an island; we all need to be connected. Work at being connected. One thought: join the CISM team and give back to other emergency services workers; participate actively in the mission of the team and help your peers.

Balance. Balance. Balance. Try for balance among the various roles of your life over the period of a week. Each of us plays different roles: parent, spouse, lover, emergency services professional, volunteer, caregiver, worshipper, etc. Over the course of a week, try to do something in each one of your important roles (focus on no more than 7 roles in a given week).