Management of a Critical Incident

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What is a Critical Incident

- An event that is markedly distressing to people generally

- An abnormal or extraordinary event that causes an individual to experience notable reactions

- An incident that causes people's coping skills to be overwhelmed, which may interfere with their ability to function effectively work or home

Benefits of a Structured Critical Incident Psychological Response

- Emotional first aid
- Psychological damage control
- An effective and consistent way to respond to an incident
- Instils individual confidence and team cohesion
- Prevents poor incident response making things worse

Initial structured responses were based on Mitchell Model

- Defusing; more immediate briefer response
- Debriefing; individuals in groups reporting the facts, their thoughts and feelings, and receiving education about identifying symptoms and moving towards closure
- Research identified concerns about mandatory nature, risk of re-trauma and ineffectiveness

Principles worth keeping

- Generally 24 to 72 hours after event
- Reduce stress reactions evident following the critical incident
- Accelerate the normal recovery process though education, awareness and stress management techniques
- Reduce the likelihood of PTSD developing
- Not therapy, nor an investigation
- Identify those needing individual follow-up

Current State of the field

- Methodological flaws in research

- Misapplication of Mitchell model

- Political use of term "defusing" abandoning it rather than clarification. Replacing term with Psychological First Aid and Skills for Stress Recovery

- Not appropriate for acute grief/ loss

- "One-off" structured debriefings – not appropriate; Follow up/outreach is critical component

- Insufficient evidence yet to show prevents PTSD

- Flexible approach required depending on nature of incident and teams and persons involved

- Training of peer support persons to increase access to support

What Do Individuals Want From CI Service?

- Independent advice

- Support and reassurance

- Caring and human attitude

- Professional experience

- Help to regain control

- Follow up

- A sense that their organisation cares

- Guidance under pressure

Critical Incident Stress *Feelings*
NORMAL

- Fear - of damage to oneself and others, of being left alone or of losing something

 - of breaking down or losing control, of a similar event happening again

- Helplessness - a crisis shows up human powerlessness as well as strength

- Sadness - for injuries and losses of every kind

- Guilt - for being better off than others, - regrets for things not done

- Shame - for being exposed as helpless, emotional and needing others

- Anger -at what has happened, at whom caused it or allowed it to happen

- at the injustice and senseless of it all

- Hope – that things will be better in the future

Individual Support

- Liaise with referral sources and gain an understanding of what has occurred
- Assess their current coping in the context of their usual coping
- Establish person's support network
- Non judgemental listening
- Provide information/education about reactions (no symptom lists)
- If person is very distressed, use immediate psychological strategies, ie, grounding techniques
- Arrange follow up as required (incl. timing)

Follow-up

- From one day to two weeks later
- Individual, and if necessary group
- Essential that it occurs; credibility and care
- Determine presence of ongoing stress reactions
- Decision on future support, counselling, etc
- Feedback information (outcomes) from management or other persons with knowledge about incident management

Peer Support Staff

- Close to and respected by peers
- Active in on scene support
- Able to see those most affected
- Initiate contact
- Less formal intervention
- Encourage the use of EAP counselling
- When appropriate, liaise with those providing debriefing