

Practical Concepts and Training Exercises for Crisis Intervention Teams

INTRODUCTION

This guidebook is designed to be used as a practical resource for Team Coordinators in developing and maintaining a Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) team. It provides those responsible for the ongoing development and training of a team with ready made exercises and games which promote learning in a safe environment. The target of this guidebook's exercises is practice of the following interventions: Individual (One-on-One), Defusing, Debriefing (CISD), and Crisis Management Briefing (CMB). With creativity, the material in the scripts could serve as the basis for practice of any of the other six CISM interventions, but the intent was to focus on the four interventions named.

The guidebook is divided into six sections. **Section 1** is an overview of the CISM field and discusses the various types of responses for which this guidebook is designed to help the reader train, thus helping to "raise the bar" for delivering CISM services in your community.

Section 2 contains tips on operational guidelines which have been found especially important to the maintenance of a CISM team.

Section 3 represents the authors' attempts to pass on their favorite secrets and techniques for training. Some are widely used and will be familiar. Others are original with the authors. They vary along a continuum from those which teach one building block at a time in a cognitive way, to those which involve practice of complex situations under some emotional pressure. The experiential area of this section includes descriptions and instructions for five techniques: table-top exercises, role-play, group problem exercises, training games, and a model for debriefing the CISM team.

Section 4 is comprised of dozens of practice scenarios for use in a variety of exercises, e.g., One-on-One, Table-Top, Role-Plays, Group Briefings, etc. These scenarios are divided by population (firefighter/EMS, law enforcement, schools, and community groups) and contain a wide range of topics and issues. Each scenario comes complete with an instruction sheet for each participant (usually 6 to 9), which describes their role in the incident and some suggestions for thoughts and reactions they might be having.

Section 5 is a collection of group exercises and educational games, the more complex of which are included on PowerPoint on the accompanying disk. They are designed for use when time is short, provide skill practice of a lively nature, and are fun ways to end a meeting or training on a high note.

Finally, **Section 6** contains a variety of forms and a suggested reading list which have been found useful in accomplishing some of the goals proposed in the text.

This book is not intended to replace the book, "Critical Incident Stress Debriefing: An Operations Manual for CISD, Defusing and Other Group Crisis Intervention Services"

by Mitchell and Everly (2001), but rather a companion book based on its important precepts. All CISM responders should be familiar with this text.

WHY SCRIPT A SCENARIO?

It is a basic truth that most people don't really like to participate in role plays. Anyone who uses them as a regular technique will tell you that it's difficult to get volunteers. But participants' evaluations consistently bear out what the education texts teach, there is nothing like experiential learning. The evolution of training efforts in CISM reveals their increasing use by most instructors. The real question is not whether or not to use them, but how to use them.

It is quite possible to do a good role-play on an impromptu basis, provided you have some willing participants. Simply describe an event, assign each participant some role in it, and let them use their imaginations. But scripting a role-play, with written suggestions for each role, has some definite advantages. Since this is the primary rationale for much of this Handbook, it seems appropriate to list some of those advantages here.

There are some issues which will seldom get spontaneously presented in an unscripted role-play. Some issues are simply unusual or of infrequent incidence. Some issues are inherently threatening and will be avoided as much by role-players as they are by our real life debriefees. How many role-players will make up details such as physical contact with damaged bodies, the expression on a dying victim's face, or tunnel vision? How many would give you valuable examples of irrational blaming, or anger directed at a dead colleague after a suicide? Scripting is one way to make sure the range of thoughts, reactions, and symptoms portrayed in a role-play at least approximates real life. Scripting can allow the trainer to target specific lessons. Want your group to focus on ways to handle anger and blaming? Give them a script in which several characters are told to present those issues.

Believe it or not, most role-plays end up being tougher than the average real life response. Role-players have a tendency to present their own worst case scenario or worst fear. Also, role-players often don't know each other as well as our real life participants do and thus are not as spontaneously supportive of one another. Often, these factors combine to leave an unrealistically negative picture in the minds of new trainees. Scripting allows us to sprinkle groups with naturally helping characters, unaffected characters, and more realistic symptoms. Scripting a role-play can bring out the good in groups, just like real life. Also, following the instructions labeled "Getting Started," and "Instructions to Participants," will help avoid the more common pitfalls of role-play.

An innovation called the "Table-Top Exercise" is described. It uses the same scenarios, but provides for a less threatening, slow motion walk through of the group process. It has shown itself to be especially helpful in building newer team members' understanding of the thought processes of veteran members during a response.

These scripts are offered as a method of systematically training for a wide but typical variety of lessons to be learned in doing CISM work. They are sprinkled throughout with almost every theme, reaction, and symptom in the book. The "Instructor's Guide Sheet" accompanying each script contains a summary of the suggested themes, warnings

about some imbedded surprises, and sample questions to guide the processing after the role-play.

In some of the scenarios, there may be individuals who should not be included in the intervention. These examples can demonstrate the necessity of a good intake process to help define who should be in the debriefing/defusing. Probably most debriefers have been in a situation where one debriefee's presence has disrupted or seriously impaired the group educational process. Scripting a few such common surprises is another way to improve their preparedness.