

## Life Changing Events

*How CISM has changed forever*

**By Dan McGuire, BCETS, CATSM**

Who can get the images of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 removed from their minds, souls, and daily conversations? Life as we know it as individuals, communities, a nation and as CISM professionals shall be ever changed. While it's been several weeks since the terrorist attacks on New York City, Washington, DC, and Pennsylvania, we as a population still struggle to find understanding in the senseless acts of that day.

As I looked at the first televised images of the beloved Trade Towers burning, then collapsing, all I could think of was a fellow CISM colleague who I knew worked in the North Tower. I laughed at myself that day as I tried to call her. How funny our actions and reactions can be in such a time of chaos and mind-numbing vexation. I'm happy to report that my friend and colleague is safe and doing as well as one can expect.

I even called my mother in my hometown (I think everyone who could did the same) and asked if she was watching the news and was she all right.

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## How the workplace was altered by 9/11/01

**By Dan McGuire, BCETS, CATSM**

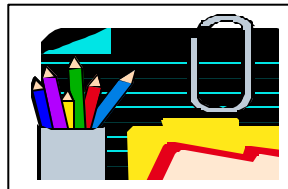
Typically, when we are exposed to danger, tragedies, and overpowering death and destruction, our thoughts are not usually reminding us that our place of business or workplace is also truly entwined in these disasters. However, the consequences of September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 have penetrated our workplaces—places we normally consider safe and “immune” to such dangers. Unfortunately, they are no longer that way.

In most cases, when we look at Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) in the workplace setting, we think of the emergency responders and what they do to help us to recover from our emergency events. Our first concern is usually that our medical needs are taken care of and then we will be transported to the hospital.

It should be clear to every supervisor, manager, and EAP professional that the events of 9/11/01 have and will continue to affect your employees and peers and that the typical workplace response to them needs to be altered. We now must look at establishing CISM in our offices, factories and other work areas with a new acknowledgment of its crucial place among our managerial responsibilities.

If there was ever a time to form your own peer-based CISM team, this would be it. My years of experience in forming such teams have confirmed that they are well received. The teams have responded effectively in the workplace to assist staff in addressing their concerns and speaking openly about how they were personally affected, even if not directly involved.

You as a manager or other leader should also carefully review your in-house disaster response plans and make the



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**HAPPY HOLIDAYS TO YOU AND YOURS!**

## *CISM pre-planning con't*

The message that was broadcast on our local CISM team pager read: "Due to terrorist attacks in NYC, all team members are now on full alert and stand-by for further directions and information". I struggled to find the right words when I had to get that message to my team here in Rochester, NY, and start to activate our disaster plan. What was that message going to do to them and were we ready? Time told me that we were well prepared and gave me fresh appreciation for what wonderful professionals I work with.

After shaking off those first waves of fright, I knew that we as professionals in the delivery of CISM were facing a new landscape, one that would require tremendous insight to determine how were we going to respond to this calamity of a scale we had never seen or experienced before. We as CISM specialists will have to revisit our "rules of engagement" and re-think how we will go forward from here.

## Disasters and the human responses to them

The events of 9/11/01 have taken a heavy toll on all Americans, with a special emphasis on those in the emergency services. Even the date of the terrorist attacks, 9-11, only makes this event all the more profound.

As CISM teams work with crews that are toiling at the site of destruction, we are seeing some commonly experienced reactions, thoughts and fears. It's important that we all begin to recognize some of these responses and put them to work for us.

First, begin to accept that life as we knew it has radically changed forever. Our senses of security, safety and invulnerability have been forever compromised. We as Americans have not dealt with such disruption of these basics needs for many, many years.

Secondly, those of us who are firefighters, EMTs and other emergency responders have seen a huge loss of fellow rescue workers to a level that **was** unthinkable.

The images of crushed fire trucks, ambulances and police vehicles will bring intense feelings of loss, sadness, and complete senselessness that can easily overwhelm even the most seasoned veteran of the "streets". Even more distressing are the feelings of not being able to do more, feelings that can lead to high levels of stress, anger, and hopelessness.

There are many things you can do to help yourself in managing the feelings, thoughts and emotions that are very strong right now. They include:

- Limit your exposure to the massive amount of media coverage that we all are being exposed to. Simply put, you need to take a break from watching the many reports, newscasts, and endless commentaries.
- Realize the critical incident stress in you is real and it is affecting **everyone**. These are very normal feelings and reactions of normal people to a very, very abnormal event.
- Allow yourself to feel sad, grieve, and be able to express your reactions to your peers, family and others close to you.

### **Be on the lookout for in yourself:**

- Hyper-vigilance, can't get away from the event
- Shock
- Grief, Sadness
- Stomach problems
- Increased agitation
- Inability to rest or sleep
- Intrusive images, recurring bad dreams
- Difficulty in conducting normal communications with family, friends, and peers
- Intensive anger and other emotions

Should you be deployed to NYC, here are topics we are reviewing with the in-going crews:

### **What they can expect:**

- Higher than usual levels of anxiety and emotions.
- At best, mobilizations can be less organized than expected.
- Expect "hurry up, then wait".
- All of your skills may not be used, so frustration can make you feel you're "not doing enough".
- Personal emotions and fears can be quickly brought to the surface when you are exposed to such complete destruction.
- Past critical incidents can and will be "brought back" to your mind and they may affect your ability to manage the current events.

Simply stated, you need to permit yourself to move through the critical incident stress, have realistic expectations of yourself and others and know that there is assistance from many CISM professionals, clergy, EAP and from those who care.t

**CISM RELATED WEBSITES:**

Check out the websites below for further information on CISM, books on CISM and other good stuff!

**International Critical Incident Stress Foundation (ICISF) [www.icisf.org](http://www.icisf.org)**

**American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress (AAETS)**

[www.aaets.org](http://www.aaets.org)



**CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

3<sup>RD</sup> ISSUE OF "THE CISM PERSPECTIVE"

PLACE? YOUR MAILBOX

TIME? DECEMBER 2001

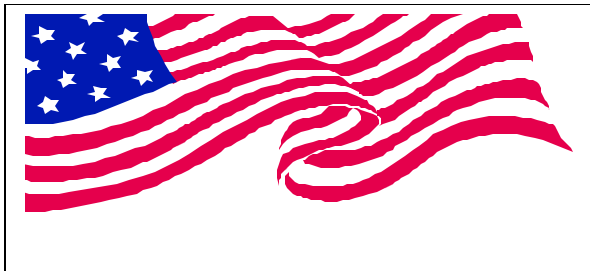
**ACUTE TRAUMATIC STRESS MANAGEMENT SEMINAR**

PLACE? ROCHESTER, NY

TIME? JANUARY 5<sup>TH</sup>, 2002

New CISM model of training for emergency responders, nurses, EAP and others. Details and course announcement enclosed.

**Remembering those we all lost...**



"Few will have the greatness to bend history itself; but each of us can work to change a small portion of events, and in the total of those acts will be written the history of this generation."

Sen. Robert Kennedy, June 6, 1966

**If you know of any individual or organization that would benefit from receiving this quarterly newsletter, please pass this on to them or send me their address and I'll add them to my mailing list. THANKS!**

Workplace changes continued from page 1 necessary adjustments and changes to them. We all can learn from the experiences of the weeks following these tragic events and take advantage of these opportunities to bring our workplaces to heightened levels of preparation for the unexpected crises that we know can occur.

I can state with a high degree of confidence that the new crisis intervention model, **Acute Traumatic Stress Management (ATSM)**, is being heavily used by many workplace groups to help employees be as prepared as possible for their own reactions and fears. ATSM also enables managers and supervisors to keep their employees functional while experiencing traumatic stress. For more in-depth information on ATSM, please contact me about setting up this invaluable training. t

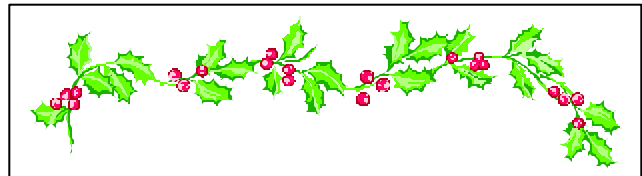
**A Holiday message to each of you**

I must begin by extending my thanks to all of you that have called me and helped my business grow this year. Someone once said, "the biggest risk is not taking one". Without the encouragement, well wishes and many, many good tips of great information, I'm sure that I would not be enjoying my new business venture as much as I am.

I hope that each of you find in this upcoming holiday season, a reason to celebrate, rejoice and share time with the ones that are important to you.

Having family, friends and colleagues in these austere and sometimes frightful days and weeks, can be the best source of support and commitment. Only with their help are we able to withstand anything that is put in our paths.

May the New Year be one of wellness, of success, and of renewed hope and the ability to be at peace with yourself and with the world in which we now live. The best of the holidays to you.



## RECOMMENDED READING

### *ACUTE TRAUMATIC STRESS MANAGEMENT (ATSM)*

AUTHORS: MARK LERNER, PH. D.

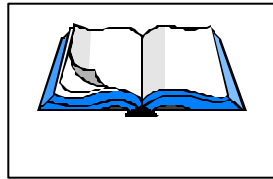
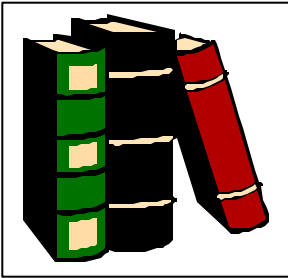
RAYMOND SHELTON, PH. D.

PUBLISHED 2001

### *CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS & TRAUMA IN THE WORKPLACE*

AUTHOR: Gerald W. Lewis Ph. D.

PUBLISHED 1994



## Are you ready for a critical incident?

When you are working with a company or consultant, it's significant to your success that you understand the services they are offering to you.

I have listed my consulting services for you below:

- Comprehensive CISM needs assessment
- CISM pre-education program design and presentation
- Acute Traumatic Stress Management (ATSM) training
- CISM Team design and establishment
- CISM educational programs
- CISM pre-plan and program design
- Line of duty death (LODD) pre-plan and response program design
- **Programs are flexible to your needs and budgets**



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