



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF POLICE CHAPLAINS

B07 – Responding to a Crisis

B07 - Responding to a Crisis - Revised April 2014



Anatomy of a Crisis

- Crucial situation
- Hazardous event
- Vulnerable condition
- Perceived threat
- Grief producing event
- Usually unexpected and sudden

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Training Objectives

- Understanding a crisis
- Tools for assessing a crisis
- Understanding the phases of a crisis
- Understanding the types of crises
- Actions to take following a crisis
- Ways to cope with anger, fear, and vulnerability
- The role of the chaplain during a crisis

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Anatomy of a Crisis

- ▣ Sense of bewilderment
- ▣ Sense of danger
- ▣ Sense of confusion
- ▣ Sense of impasse
- ▣ Sense of desperation
- ▣ Sense of apathy
- ▣ Sense of helplessness
- ▣ Sense of urgency
- ▣ Sense of discomfort

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Definition of a Crisis

An unstable or crucial time or state of affairs whose outcome will make a decisive difference for better or worse.



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High Anxiety or Emotional Shock Phase

- ▣ Normal response triggered by the body's nervous system.
- ▣ Victims in this phase fall into two main groups
 - Hysterical and very active
 - Stunned, inactive, and depressed



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High Anxiety or Emotional Shock Phase

- ☐ Physical symptoms
 - Empty feeling in the stomach
 - Intense, subjective pain or tension
 - Nausea, vomiting
 - Fainting
 - Lack of muscular control
 - Need for sighing
 - Agitation such as wringing of hands
 - Screaming or crying



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Managing the High Anxiety Victim

- ☐ Remove the victim from the scene to a less threatening, more secure environment
- ☐ Reassure the victim that you are there to help
- ☐ Talk to the victim
- ☐ Touch the victim, if appropriate
- ☐ Direct the victim to specific, task-oriented actions. For example, tell him/her to move, sit down, hold an object, or answer your questions

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High Anxiety or Emotional Shock Phase

- ☐ Physical symptoms
 - Hyperactivity
 - Feeling of tightness in the throat, difficulty breathing or swallowing
 - Rapid breathing
 - Flushed face
 - Dull eyes
 - Staring into space
 - Emotionally out of control



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Denial Phase

- ☐ Normal response to a stressful situation in which the victim can or will not acknowledge the existence of a crisis
 - A protection mechanism, preventing too much from happening too fast
 - Even very sick or seriously injured people tend to deny a crisis

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High Anxiety or Emotional Shock Phase

- ☐ Psychological symptoms
 - General feeling of distress and loss
 - Guilt feelings (If only I had . . .)
 - Hostile reactions that come from a need to assuage the feelings of guilt
 - Loss of patterns of conduct or reason
 - General feeling of helplessness or taking on some of the traits/behaviors of the deceased



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Managing the Denying Victim

- ☐ Allow the person to deny without agreeing with him/her
- ☐ Gently and carefully tell the facts
- ☐ Repeat again and again, if necessary
- ☐ Don't make empty promises such as "Everything will be ok."
- ☐ Show genuine compassion and understanding



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Anger Phase

- ☐ Normal response to frustration expressed when people feel they cannot cope with a situation and feel overwhelmed by it
 - Angry person may blame himself/herself, others, the deceased, or God
 - Guilt and anger sometimes cause family problems
 - Crisis not only creates problems, but also reveals them

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Managing the Remorseful Victim

- ☐ Listen carefully
- ☐ Reassure the victim
- ☐ Avoid judgmental statements
- ☐ Allow the victim to express himself/herself
- ☐ Understand that it is not wrong to feel sorrow

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Managing the Angry Victim

- ☐ Don't take the anger personally
- ☐ Allow the victim verbal expression
- ☐ Show confidence; tell the victim you realize he/she is angry, but that you are there now and will do your best to help
- ☐ Don't argue. You cannot win against emotion
- ☐ Recognize that anger is normal, although unpleasant



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Ramification of a Crisis

- ☐ Impact – the point at which the crisis occurs
- ☐ Withdrawal or confusion phase
- ☐ Adjustment phase (learn to do things differently)
- ☐ Reconciliation (brought back to right relationships) – restitution
- ☐ Reconstruction

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Remorse, Grief, and Reconciliation Phase

- ☐ Filled with feelings and expressions of guilt and sorrow
- ☐ Victim often blames himself/herself
 - Victims often blame themselves for suicides
 - Victims tend to idealize the deceased person and exaggerate their own bad points such as "I should have . . ."
 - Grief opens old wounds and memories

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Assessing a Crisis

- ☐ Assess the situation
 - Determine who is involved
 - What was the cause
 - How serious is the problem
- ☐ Make a plan
- ☐ Implement the plan
 - Act
 - Re-assess the plan
 - Recap

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Responses to a Crisis

- ❑ Emotionally weak
- ❑ Physically impaired
- ❑ Deny reality
- ❑ Unrealistic approach to life
- ❑ Have a lot of guilt
- ❑ Place blame
- ❑ Become super independent or dependent
- ❑ Become very rigid
- ❑ Become theologically unbalanced

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What To Do After a Crisis

- ❑ Get a balance of work and social life
- ❑ Eat well balanced meals
- ❑ Talk to people close to
- ❑ Verbalize thoughts, fears, anxieties
- ❑ Be supportive of others going through the crisis
- ❑ Get plenty of rest and exercise
- ❑ Keep a sense of humor
- ❑ Can take six to ten weeks or longer to recover

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Types of Crises

- ❑ Natural disasters
 - Flood, tornado, mudslide, earthquake, fire
- ❑ Death
 - Family, friend, a child, department line-of-duty death, or natural death
- ❑ Suicides
 - Family, friend, department

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Chaplains at Crime Scenes

- ❑ Always report to the on-scene supervisor upon arrival
- ❑ Always stay outside crime scene tape unless invited in by an officer or investigator
- ❑ When invited into the scene, use the path marked for entrance and exit
- ❑ Never touch anything inside the crime scene



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What Not to Do After a Crisis

- Drink caffeine laden products
- Consume foods high in spices and sugar
- Drink alcohol
- Finger pointing
- Keep anger, fears, anxieties inside



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Critical Incident Stress

- ❑ The body's normal reaction to an abnormal situation
- ❑ Symptoms can be physical, cognitive, emotional, behavioral, or spiritual
- ❑ Symptoms may occur immediately or days, weeks, or months after the event
- ❑ Chaplains should be able to recognize Critical Incident Stress

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Examples of Critical Incidents

- ❑ Fatal accidents
- ❑ Murders
- ❑ Suicides
- ❑ Any event involving children
- ❑ Fatal fires
- ❑ Elder or child abuse
- ❑ Officer involved shooting
- ❑ Officer Line-of-Duty Death or Injury



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Emotional Signs/Symptoms

- ❑ Survivor's guilt
- ❑ Irritability
- ❑ Intense anger
- ❑ Grief/sadness
- ❑ Depression; feeling lost/alone
- ❑ Emotional outbursts
- ❑ Denial
- ❑ Fear
- ❑ Uncertainty
- ❑ Agitation



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Physical Signs/Symptoms

- ❑ Headaches
- ❑ Fatigue
- ❑ Rapid pulse
- ❑ Elevated blood pressure
- ❑ Nausea/vomiting
- ❑ Profuse sweating
- ❑ Weakness; dizziness



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Behavioral Signs/Symptoms

- ❑ Restlessness
- ❑ Changed communications
- ❑ Withdrawal/suspiciousness
- ❑ Appetite changes
- ❑ Increased alcohol consumption
- ❑ Changes in social activities
- ❑ Startle reflex intensified



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Cognitive Signs/Symptoms

- ❑ Hyper-vigilance
- ❑ Intrusive images
- ❑ Confusion/poor memory
- ❑ Decreased concentration
- ❑ Blaming
- ❑ Uncertainty
- ❑ Heightened or lowered alertness
- ❑ Nightmares



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Spiritual Signs/Symptoms

- ❑ Questioning of faith
- ❑ Anger at God
- ❑ Distance from religion
- ❑ Belief that God is powerless
- ❑ "How could God let this happen?"
- ❑ Anger toward religious leaders



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Dealing with Critical Incident Stress

- ☐ Alternate exercise and relaxation
- ☐ Be with people who have experienced similar stress
- ☐ Make no important decisions
- ☐ Avoid alcohol and drugs
- ☐ Allow yourself to feel bad
- ☐ Eat a healthy diet
- ☐ Talk to a trusted friend or a Chaplain
- ☐ Critical Incident Stress Debriefing
- ☐ Peer Support Debriefing, Defusing, Intervention

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