



CRITICAL INCIDENT STRESS DEBRIEF

SCOPE

This guideline shall apply to all members of the Stoney Point Fire Department and shall be adhered to by all members.

PURPOSE

To establish the procedures for the conduct of critical incident stress debriefs within Stoney Point Fire Department.

DEFINITIONS

Critical Incident Stress Debrief - intervention conducted by a trained mental health professional, in either a group or individual format, to encourage traumatized individuals to share their thoughts and feelings about the critical incident

Guideline - a general rule, principle, outline of a policy

Member – any career, volunteer, staff, and auxiliary personnel affiliated with the department

Shall - indicates a mandatory requirement

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GUIDELINES

Stoney Point Fire Department is an all-hazard emergency response agency. The members of the department will likely encounter traumatic and stressful incidents on a regular basis. Every Firefighter will experience and manage these incidents in different ways. Some members may experience long term detrimental effects from exposure to traumatic or prolonged stressful incidents. These effects may appear immediately or have a delayed response. The mental health and wellbeing of Stoney Point Fire Department responders is important. It is important to remember that seeking assistance for traumatic stress is not a weakness, nor are those that seek assistance, weak. Without professional intervention, these personnel may experience declining work performance and deterioration of family relationships, as well as increased health problems. It is the objective of critical incident stress debriefing to provide professional intervention after major incidents to minimize stress-related injury to Stoney Point Fire Department personnel.



Programs

Standard Operating Guidelines (SOG)

Incidents

Stoney Point Fire Department responds to incidents that expose personnel to unusually strong emotional involvement. Many of these incidents qualify for a Critical Incident Stress Debriefing. Among the incidents that may require a debriefing are:

- serious injury or death of a Firefighter or other emergency response personnel
- Mass casualty incidents
- suicide of a Stoney Point Fire Department member
- serious injury or death of a civilian resulting from department operations
- death of a child, or violence to a child
- death of a patient following extraordinary and prolonged expenditure of physical and emotional energy during rescue efforts by department personnel
- incidents that attract extremely unusual or critical news media coverage
- an incident with circumstances so unusual or the sights and sounds so distressing as to produce a high level of emotional stress

Onsite Management

Minimizing the exposure of response personnel to these stressful incidents results in fewer stress-related problems. It is therefore preferred that the Incident Commander shall reduce this exposure by:

- limiting personnel exposure to the scene
- rotating personnel from high stress tasks to low stress tasks
- reassigning initial response personnel as soon as possible
- request response by mental health providers as necessary

On-site evaluation and counseling should also be considered for some critical incidents when time and circumstances permit.

Activation of the Debriefing Process

Any Officer may initiate the debriefing process. For serious events, this process shall be accomplished from the scene by contacting the on-call Duty Chief. Company officers whose crew may have experienced a traumatic event may also initiate the debriefing process by contacting the on-call Duty Chief. The Fire Chief will determine the level of debriefing required. Critical incident stress debrief assistance can be obtained by the department through the North Carolina Law Enforcement Assistance Program (NC LEAP). The Operations Chief will be responsible for coordinating the debriefing process, follow-up care, and other support functions.

Debriefing Attendance

Attendance to a critical incident stress debriefing is **MANDATORY** for all personnel who were directly exposed to the traumatic incident or otherwise identified as a person suffering symptoms by the Company Officer or Fire Chief.

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Debriefing

The critical incident stress debriefing is not a critique of the individual's or Stoney Point Fire Department's operations at the incident. Performance issues will not be discussed during the debriefing. The debriefing process provides formats in which personnel can discuss their feelings and reactions and, thus, reduce the stress resulting from exposure to critical incidents. All debriefings will be strictly confidential and may be conducted either on a one on one or small group basis. The debriefings most commonly utilized are:

- On-scene or near-scene debriefing (onsite management)
- Initial defusing: conducted shortly after the incident. Primarily informational
- Formal debriefing meetings: conducted within 72 hours of incident. Confidential non-evaluative discussion of involvement, thoughts, and feelings resulting from the incident. Also, discussion of possible stress-related symptoms
- Follow-up debriefing: conducted weeks or months after incident, concerned with delayed or prolonged stress symptoms, completed informally
- Individual consults: available at any time, as needed. One-to-one counseling for any concerns related to the incident

Relieving Personnel from Duty

The traumatic or stressful circumstances of a critical incident may result in a recommendation that individuals or units be taken out of service for a critical incident stress debriefing. Personnel or units may return to their stations in an out-of-service status and allow crews to determine for themselves when they are mentally and physically prepared to return to service. In the circumstance that an individual or crew cannot return to service for the remainder of the shift, accommodations shall be made to recall personnel for staffing and family members alerted of their returning Firefighter. A critical incident stress debriefing will be made for the earliest possible time for these individuals. The individuals shall inform their Company Officer and Fire Chief of their readiness to return to service.

References

NFPA 1500

NC LEAP

North Carolina First Responder Peer Support

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