

Child Events and Responder Reactions

“Nobody’s Kid Proof”

Responding to events involving a child or teenager is emotionally more difficult. Those involved in EMS recognize and agree that it can be especially devastating if that child or teen is seriously injured or the situation ultimately results in their death. It is these “Kids” calls that profoundly touch each of us in some capacity, often result in some behavior changes, and are not soon or easily forgotten.

It is not surprising then that 50-60% of requests for post-incident stress debriefings (CISDs) for emergency responders follow responses to a child or teen event. If you are a parent yourself, you might connect to the tragedy in a more personal way, including how you think about and how you behave toward your own children. Sometimes, the change happens as soon as you return home.

Some of the more common reactions and feelings that emergency service personnel experience (and are “normal”) when the victim is a child or a teen include:

- A sense of guilt or failure, or an unfounded sense of somehow being responsible for the outcome, especially if the child dies
- A lowered confidence in one’s skills and performance
- Decreased interest or willingness to continue being a care provider.....including, thoughts about resignation
- Intense anger, especially if the injury or death was caused by carelessness or maliciousness of adults in the child or teen’s life
- An overwhelming sense of sadness or feeling that everything is wrong with the world that would let this happen
- Feeling personal vulnerability and increased anxiety about the health and welfare of one’s own children

A nursing coordinator for a children’s hospital, Cynthia Lynch, RN, wrote an article that describes why we often have emotional reactions to child events. She notes that “Whether you are a rookie or a veteran, an officer or a staff member, and whether or not there is direct or distant personal involvement with the case, traumatic incidents involving kids are powerful, painful and personal.” She speculates that we all share in a form of “universal parenthood” that makes us vulnerable to the pain we experience when a very young person dies.

Utilizing stress debriefing or defusing services after a difficult response involving a child or a teen can be extremely helpful. A goal of stress debriefing is to assist the responder in moving through those reactions of grief, sorrow, and the unfounded feeling that you are somehow responsible. A debriefing can speed your recovery and prepare you to manage the next child incident you are dispatched to. Nobody is kid proof.

Arrowhead CISM Team
www.arrowheadems.com/cism

