



**I-CART**

**Indiana Crisis Assistance Response Team**

317-596-2202    [www.i-cart.org](http://www.i-cart.org)

### **Debriefing of Helpers**

When extremely stressful events occur and helpers are called to assist people in coping with these events, helpers become stressed too and need to receive support to help them cope with the stress. Because their experience of the crisis is somewhat different from that of people not in the helping role, the most appropriate setting for them is a group of their peers who have shared the experience.

After an intense or prolonged intervention, helpers need to talk with other helpers about:

- What happened during the intervention
- What they did as a part of the response
- What they thought and felt
- What their experience means to them
- Stress symptoms
- How they coped (are coping) with the stress
- What went well and what they would do differently

They need to hear that they are appreciated for what they did, especially if they contributed to an unsuccessful effort or were otherwise unable to prevent a negative outcome. Most of all, they need to establish completion on the intervention. To assist helpers to do this, it is essential that a follow-up meeting be scheduled to reiterate, evaluate, and summarize the intervention. This meeting should typically occur within two weeks of the crisis event, or as negotiated at the end of the intervention. All members of the school's internal crisis team, all staff called in from other schools, and all outside counselors should be invited to this meeting and allowed time off to attend. The meeting should be conducted by a mental health professional trained in crisis intervention, ideally a crisis trained counselor who was not on site during the intervention. The tone should be positively evaluative, without blame or

faultfinding; individuals should be encouraged to support each other as necessary. Ultimate recognition that everyone did their best is essential, whether the outcomes were as positive as we would have liked or not.

It is important to remember that no human being can experience repeated stresses and remain healthy without support. Care of the caregivers is a small investment that pays off in a big way over time.