



# United States Army Criminal Investigation Command

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## *Brother's Keeper*

### **Army Law Enforcement Program Helps Those Who Serve**

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**Fort Belvoir, Virginia** – Stress is a monster, and few professions are as stressful as law enforcement or serving in the military during times of conflict. The exposure to traumatic or possibly horrific events is an ever-present reality; however, there are still men and women who answer the call to service. But what happens when these traumatic events are over?

A Critical Incident Stressor is defined as: an event or events that have the potential to create an overwhelming emotional reaction in an individual to the point that they are unable to function during or following the incident, or are unable to cope psychologically with an event. With this in mind, the Critical Incident Peer Support (CIPS) course was born.

“For our Special Agents, Military Police, and our first responders, they don’t have the luxury of deciding what type of scene they will respond to,” said Russell Strand, chief of Family Advocacy Law Enforcement Training Division at the United States Army Military Police School (USAMPS). “On any given day they can be responding to a child death scene, a domestic violence scene or even a mass-murder incident like the one in November at Fort Hood.”

“We ask a lot from our people, so we need to take care of them and each other, not just physically, but in all ways,” he added.

Located within the wooded landscape of Fort Leonard Wood, Mo. is the U.S. Army Military Police School (USAMPS) and the organizational home to Donna Ferguson, the branch chief and course manager for the CIPS program.

Ferguson said the course was the result of several years of exhaustive research leading to what steps could be taken to assist those Special Agents, Soldiers and first responders following a horrific event.

“CIPS has been preparing Army Law Enforcement professionals for responses to catastrophic incidents and assisting with follow up with Soldiers after a response to an incident to fill the shortage of psychologists, counselors and combat stress teams,” she said. “The course is not designed to replace mental health or the chaplaincy but to support the process.”

The program is peer based, but USAMPS can deploy a quick reaction team to assist with a major incident, as they did in the summer of 2009 for a unit deployed in Iraq

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and again November 5, for the shootings at Fort Hood.

“Mental health operates strongly on intervention, whereas this course is designed on prevention,” Ferguson said. “Most Soldiers don’t seek mental health until their situation has become overwhelming, unmanageable or they receive a command referral.”

“So to get help, this wall of social stigma must be torn down,” she said.

The five-day course is centered on recognizing the signs and symptoms associated with critical incident trauma and intervention strategies, allowing leaders to make accurate command decisions as it relates to Soldiers experiencing various types of trauma and stress. Subjects covered in the course include symptoms of stress, critical incident stress debriefing process, psychological effects of critical incidents and crisis intervention to ensure the preservation of the Soldiers health. Coping skills, communication and functions of the peer supporter are also stressed.

“Students learn how to develop a Critical Incident Peer Support SOP for a platoon through a brigade size element,” Ferguson said. “When Soldiers are trained in this area, commanders begin to see less family violence, greater retention, and less medical difficulties as a result of psychological trauma.”

“Unlike other MOSs, on and off the battlefield we have a continuing mission, and the job never stops,” she added. Ferguson said Soldiers are placed under a huge amount of stress during a deployment however, when they return home they go back into a training mode.

“For our Special Agents and our Military Policemen, their mission continues regardless of where they happen to be physically located,” she added.

Army law enforcement, at all levels, has found this training to be quite successful. However, the program works for all Soldiers in every career field that have been exposed to a crisis situation or have been placed under repetitive stressful situations, like multiple deployments.

“We have found over the last two years after incorporating other MOSs into the training that the same successful results are yielded as with Special Agents and MPs,” Ferguson said. “The Army has specific training in the areas of PTSD and suicide; however, what most people do not realize is that suicide and PTSD are only two of the impacts of CIS.”

“We must begin to look at the total problem in order to combat any of the problems,” she said.

Strand, a leading expert in child abuse and sexual assault investigations, stressed the importance of looking at the whole-person approach when dealing with critical incident stress, and the through this approach assists the Special Agent, Soldier or first responder through the process.

“Not everyone reacts to stress the same way,” he said. “Even not reacting is a reaction, so when we respond to an incident, we try to frame the incident and kind of recreate the event in a way that everyone can understand.”

Strand said that when the CIPS team arrives on a scene and begins a debriefing, they start the process by finding out who everyone is and what their responsibilities were.

Once the facts are established, the challenging task of working through the event begins, to include dealing with any signs or symptoms of critical or acute incident stress.

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“Now that everyone understands what everyone’s role in the event was, they have a way to process the information,” he said. “Now it makes sense.”

Ferguson stated that Special Agents who are trained in CIPS are better prepared when a trauma or critical incident takes place and enables them to recognize it in their peers before it’s too late.

Army law enforcement professionals, who have been exposed to the program, all agree that healing process begins immediately for groups exposed to an incident that are involved in a debriefing/defusing within 8 to 24 hours following the event. Ferguson said that through the understanding of how Critical Incident Stress, Post Traumatic Stress and cumulative/chronic stress works, will help those communities talk to their peers and seek assistance.

“The program has been and continues to be a proven asset to the Army both in garrison and deployed,” she said. “This program is saving lives.”

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