SUCCESSFUL INTERVENTION

After the incident at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School and the exposure of officers and dispatchers to extreme trauma, early critical incident intervention became a primary concern for the administrators of responding police agencies. In the afternoon following the shootings, contact was made with a local mental health practitioner and a law enforcement administrator (two of the authors) experienced in critical incident stress management and debriefings as well as BHT.21

A team composed of several local police departments’ certified critical incident stress debriefers was summoned. The team used a combination of debriefings, crisis counseling, and components of BHT with the officers involved. Through the application of these approaches, psychoeducation regarding risk factors, stress management techniques, and peer support were provided.

Further, open dialogue between the mental health practitioner, personnel trained to assist with crisis response, and officers who responded to the scene focused on addressing the impacted officers’ current emotional reactions as well as suggesting strategies for coping in the coming days and months. The interactions with peers helped officers learn about tapping into work and family support systems and becoming intuitive about their own mental health. Additionally, officers were encouraged to seek professional assistance if they began to experience PTSD symptoms.

Through this comprehensive approach, the officers gained a knowledge base to help themselves and their peers, should the need arise. Further, resources in the community were identified for those seeking additional assistance from the mental health community.