



The Management of Emotionally Disturbing  
Interventions in Fire & Rescue Services

*Who helps the helpers ?...*

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**Leopoldsburg Fire Service**



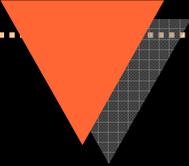
# Contents

- ◆ *Trauma and Taboo* in Fire & Rescue Services
  - ◆ How did it all start within Fire Brigades ?
    - The creation of the Fire-Fighter & Emergency Medical Stress Teams (FiST) in 1993
  - ◆ FiST : Working Principles & Rationale
  - ◆ FiST : National & Provincial Structures
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    - Pre-, Peri- & Post-Deployment Support Activities
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  - ◆ **Conclusions & Way Ahead**
- 



# **Firefighter & Emergency Medical Stress Teams**

**It's OK not to be OK!  
Facio ut Facias!**

**++ 32 (0) 476 22 80 16**



# Trauma & Taboo in Fire & Rescue Services

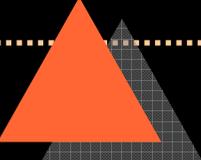
*Why do professionals need support ?*

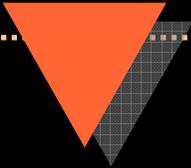
## *PREVIOUS REACTION FROM FIRE & EMS CHIEFS*

- “ Aren’t they all sort of ‘trauma-junkies’? ”
  - “ Didn’t they learn to cut off their feelings? “
  - “ Aren’t they simply used to it? “
  - “ Don’t you make these fire-fighters/paramedics weaker by talking about their traumatic stress? “
  - “ Don’t you create stress, by talking about it? “
  - “ The not-invented-by-engineers-syndrom “
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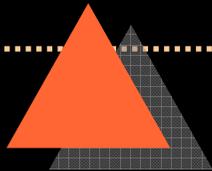
# How did it all start within Fire Brigades & Ambulance Services?

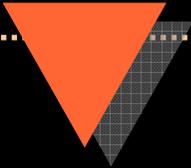
- ◆ **Psycho-Social Support for Peacekeepers**
    - Pre-, Peri- & Post-Deployment Support Activities
    - First spontaneous initiatives among colleagues
    - Contact with the CISM (Mitchell, 1983) network
  - ◆ **Spontaneous ‘Demobilisation’ & ‘Defusing’**
  - ◆ **Structured Help through ‘Debriefing’**
  - ◆ **Multidisciplinary ‘Peer Debriefing’**
  - ◆ **Prevention, Care & After-Care**
- 



# FiST : Working Principles & Rationale

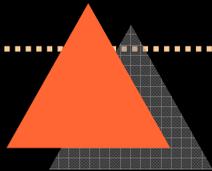
- ◆ **Early Detection of Critical and/or Exceptional Interventions**
  - Proactive Outreach : Primary & Secondary Prevention of PTSR/PTSD
  - Selection & Training of Peer Support Officers : 1st Line -> FiST Antennas
  - Development of Crisis Scenarios : Pre-Incident Networking across “Disaster Disciplines” & Collective Field Training
  - Action Charts & SOP’s : Multidisciplinary Focus (Fire, EMS, Police)
- ◆ **Systematic Analysis of Emotionally Disturbing & Potentially Traumatizing Interventions (Keeping the Score...)**
- ◆ **Time Axis of Trauma-Working Through: Long Term Support**
- ◆ **Supervised Peer Debriefing : On-Scene, Immediate & Post-Immediate Support Activities to Prevent Emotional Losses**

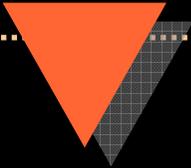




# FiST : National & Provincial Structures

- ◆ National FiST Staff\*
  - National FiST Supervisor (Psychologist)
  - National FiST Coordination Team
  - National FiST Emergency Doctor
  - National FiST Secretary (Fire Dept Chief)
  - National FiST Financial Expert / Lawyer
- ◆ \* All FiST Members = Professional or Voluntary  
Firefighters/Paramedics or Doctors



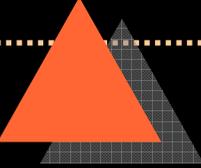


# FiST : National & Provincial Structures

## ◆ Provincial FiST Staff\*

- Provincial FiST Supervisor (Psychologist)
- Provincial FiST Coordination Team
- Provincial FiST Secretary (Fire Dept Chief)
- Provincial FiST Doctor(s)

## ◆ Provincial FiST Workers

- FiST Antennas
  - FiST Debriefers (Local, Regional, National)
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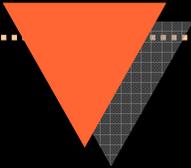


# FiST: National & Provincial Structures

## *FiST Staff Members' Profiles*

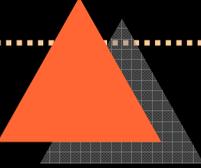
### ◆ **FiST Supervisor**

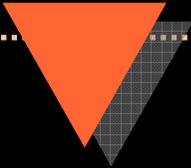
- Quality Control over Applied Support - Principles
  - Periodical Debriefing of FiST Interventions/Debriefers
  - Point-of-Contact with Professional Help
  - Participate in Selection of Team Members
  - Control FiST Deontology & Philosophy
  - Teacher for Firefighter/Paramedic Training Facilities
  - In charge of FiST Annual Training Program
- 



# FiST: National & Provincial Structures

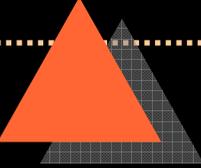
## ◆ **FiST Secretary**

- FiST Public Relations
  - Outreaching Procedure to Non-FiST Services
  - Organize Trimestrial FiST Follow-Up Meetings
  - Point-of-Contact National Staff
  - Point-of-Contact Provincial Staffs (other provinces)
  - Information management
  - Official Spokesman (Authorities, Press, ...)
- 



# FiST : National & Provincial Structures

## ◆ **FiST Emergency Doctor(s)**

- National/Provincial Medical Advisor
  - Back-Up for Specific Bio-Medical Trauma-Related Pathologies
  - Confidential Relationship with Team Members
  - Fitness Advisor
  - Back-Up for Difficult (Large-Scale) Disaster Stress Evaluations or Debriefings
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# FiST : National & Provincial Structures

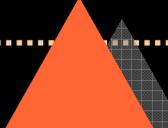
## ◆ FiST Coordination Team

- Coordinate & plan debriefing/support activities
  - Planning debriefing/support activities
  - Putting together ‘outreach teams’ (on-scene)
  - Putting together ‘debriefing teams’
  - Keeping Intervention Files Up-to-Date
  - Coaching of less experienced debriefers
- 



# The Management of Emotionally Disturbing Interventions

## *Pre-Deployment Support Activities*

- ◆ **(S)elect Potential FiST-Members among Firefighters and/or Paramedics during initial 3 Hr trauma workshop**
    - *360° selection procedure (Volunteer, Approved Confidantes)*
    - *Selection Interview with FiST Trainers (Previous Trauma)*
  - ◆ **Initial Training Course for FiST-Members**
    - *5 Day Residential Training Week, 4 Follow-Up Seminars, Permanent Supervision & Intervision, Regular Vent Sessions*
  - ◆ **Select Social Support Team among Spouses of Firefighters/Paramedics**
  - ◆ **Training Course on ‘Coathelp Techniques’ for Social Support Team & Significant Others Meetings**
  - ◆ **Organize Regular Talk Sessions/Meeting Activities**
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# The Management of Emotionally Disturbing Interventions

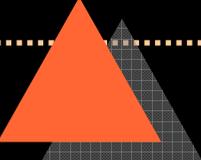
## *Peri-Deployment Support Activities*

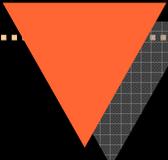
- ◆ During Fire & Rescue Ops: On-Scene Support (Ops Away FiST)
    - Long Term Ops: Continuous Support through One-on-Ones
    - Multiple Stressor Debriefings (after high intensity periods/missions)
  - ◆ Post-Intervention ‘Demobilisation’ & ‘Defusing’ Meetings:
    - Immediate Support within Fire & Rescue Department (Home FiST)
    - Post-Immediate Support with Fire & Rescue Department: Post Recovery
  - ◆ For Large Scale Interventions:
    - Initialize Immediate ‘Coathelp’ - Assuring Primary Needs by Social Support Team - Mobilize Off-Duty Colleagues
  - ◆ Self-Help, Buddy Aid & Peer Support during Intervention
    - avoid secondary victimisation, prepare for rituals, handle trauma-related information, provide (official) recognition, stimulate coathelp
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# The Management of Emotionally Disturbing Interventions

## *Post-Deployment Support Activities*

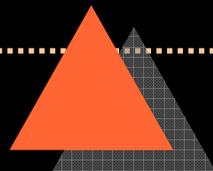
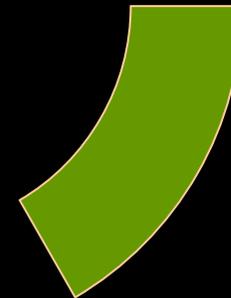
- ◆ End of intervention + 24 à 48 Hr: Information Session Fire-Fighters/Paramedics & their most significant others
  - ◆ If decided so by the group:
    - End of intervention + 72 Hr : Multidisciplinary Traumatic Stress Debriefing (TSD1) with Fire & Rescue Workers – Emergency Medical Teams
    - Guided event reconstruction & psycho-education (somatic monitored debriefing)
    - Partners can be invited on request (psycho-educational counseling for spouses)
  - ◆ For Large Scale Interventions: End of Intervention + 2 weeks (TSD2) - On request: TSD3, TSD4, ...
  - ◆ Special dates, rituals, group visit of disaster scene, ...
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# Case Studies since almost 20 years

## *Good and Bad Examples ...*

- ◆ Buscrash in Switzerland (2012)
- ◆ Pukkelpop Disaster (2011)
- ◆ Explosion in Liège, train crash Halle (2010)
- ◆ ...
- ◆ E-17 Car Pile-Up (Nazareth, Feb 1996)
- ◆ Ostend Air Crash (Ostend, Aug 1997)
- ◆ Car-Train Accident (Berlaar, 1996)
- ◆ Ruddervoorde Car Pile-Up (Ruddervoorde, 1996)
- ◆ House Fires: St Niklaas, Halle, Roborst, ...
- ◆ Hemiksem Furniture Store Fire (Christmas, 1997)
- ◆ Old interventions-Recent CISD: Hemiksem (1993),  
Maasmechelen (1996), Hasselt (1984)

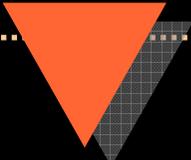




# The Creation of FiST Networks in Europe

## Euro-FiST?

- ◆ The Netherlands: FiST Zeeuws-Vlaanderen/Zeeland
  - ◆ Italy, Switzerland, Czech Republic, Switzerland & Germany:
    - Regional Workshops & Training for Fire Dept – EMS – Hospitals
    - Psicologi per I populi, La Croce Verde
  - ◆ France: Local Initiatives & Regional Initiatives
    - Unité de Soutien Psychologique (SDIS)
    - Cellules d'Urgence Médico-Psychologique (AFORCUMP)
  - ◆ Association Européenne de Psychologues Sapeurs-Pompiers *European Association for Fire & Rescue Psychologists (since 2003)*
  - ◆ Luxemburg: Groupe de Soutien Psychologique – Protection Civile
  - ◆ Australia – New Zealand – Argentina - Mexico
    - Conferences & Workshops for Fire Dept - EMS
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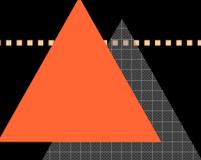


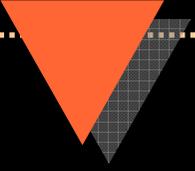
# Conclusions

... IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO START

WHAT MAKES YOU, BREAKS YOU ...

BUT WHAT BREAKS YOU, MAKES YOU





**? QUESTIONS ?**

**Ask for paper or handouts**

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