

# EMOTIONAL INCIDENTS, ACCIDENTS, AND NEAR MISSES: A CRITICAL LOOK AT CLINICAL INCIDENTS IN ADVENTURE/WILDERNESS PROGRAMS

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## Definition of Terms:

*Incident:* An incident may result in injury, illness, motivational/behavioral outcome or near miss.

*Near Miss: A Close Call:*

- A potentially dangerous situation where safety was compromised but did not result in reportable injury.
- An unplanned and unforeseen event. This rules out situations such as routine top rope falls, failure to roll a kayak for beginning student, or a fall on the trail with no injury. Put another way: A student who had not self reported a previous psychological condition and that behavior appears on the course, i.e. eating-disorder-purging, attention deficit disorder – inability to follow directions, easily distracted, etc.
- A situation where those involved express relief when the incident ends without harm.  
(what does this mean in regards to emotional near misses?)

## Motivation or Behavioral Incident

Examples would be unwillingness to participate, running away, alcohol or drug use, assaultive behavior, suicidal ideation, or emotional or psychological situation that compromises the student's/s' ability to participate in the program in a reasonably safe manner.

**Reportable injury or illness meets one or more of the following criteria:**

- requires more than simple first aid such as a “psychological” band aid
- requires more than cursory staff attention (staff’s attention is not group focused, but must spend large amounts of time with one student)
- requires follow-up care by staff in the field (themes of behaviors mount and interventions are happening on a regular basis with no significant change in behavior)
- interferes with participant’s/s’ participation (student is unable to maintain acceptable behavior for the environment, group and instructors)
- is evacuated
- is a lost day

(WRMC Incident Report Instructions 1994, page 3)

*Clinical:* having to with direct treatment and observations. (It is important to note that clinical is not a place per se, but more so a process that can take place in a variety of places)

*Critical clinical/therapeutic incident:* an unplanned event that occurs with an individual or group, that is potentially damaging to self or others. An incident that occurs on a course that may involve one or more of the following: non-violent crisis intervention (restraint), suicidal ideation, self-mutilation, psychosis, decompensation, running away, hurting self or others. This list is not comprehensive.

*Critical Incident:* “an incident is defined as any observable human activity sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences to be made about the person performing the act” (Cohen & Smith 1976, p. 6)

List examples of near misses or incidents that are psychological/behavioral...

**Instructor Response and Impact:**

How do you interpret motivational/clinical events?

Are you eager to give accounts during debriefs of what occurred, or do you tend to fear reprisal?

Do you feel adequately trained to work with the expanding complexity of client needs and profiles?

Are there things that still bother you, long after the incident has passed?

**Program and Administrative Support:**

Are you engaged in thorough debriefs following an incident?

Are they designed to promote learning as well as support?

Is there administrative support in defining what to report?

Do you receive clinical supervision of any kind, i.e. group supervision, clinical consultation, individual?

Are there critical incident stress debriefings held when an extraordinary problem occurs, i.e. suicide attempt, death, severe violence or injury, whole group rebellion?

What do you recommend to the profession and programs to aid in the continued growth of instructors?

What do you recommend to the profession and programs to aid in the continued growth and well being of participants?

How can practitioners better support one another both within programs and the profession at large? i.e. what about e-mail and chat rooms to develop ongoing dialogue with professionals across the country, as well as in your community.

