

# Encyclopedia of Evaluation

## Critical Incidents

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The concept of *critical incidents* is derived mainly from work in psychology that suggests there are events that occur in the life of a person, program, organization, or culture that substantially alter or direct subsequent events. The Critical Incident Technique (CIT), developed by John C. Flanagan during World War II, is based on studies conducted for the Aviation Psychology Program of the U.S. Army and Air Force. Common critical incidents for individuals are trauma, illness, divorce, moving, and so on. In health care, critical incidents are especially those that induce stress and may lead to undesirable consequences. Depending on the field, critical incidents are variously associated with crises (e.g., law enforcement, health care) or classic and recurring problems (e.g., teaching, management). An analysis of critical incidents is intended to systematically identify actions or events that contribute to the success or failure of individuals or organizations. This technique may underestimate the importance of routine practices or events, and there is a danger of stereotyping in the identification and characterization of critical incidents.

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