



DEBRIEF HANDOUT

When to hold the Debrief

Research suggests that debriefs should ideally be held as soon as possible, preferably within 24 hours and no later than two weeks after the incident has occurred.

The Approach

The most senior person on duty should gather the team in the team base and, if possible, with support from the team (or other leads) facilitate the debrief.

They should communicate clear goals for the debrief which can include:

1. Establishing ground rules:
 - Duration of the session, purpose of the meeting, confidentiality, facilitator and other's roles.
 - Ensure everyone is encouraged to speak but not forcing anyone to.
 - Setting clear guidelines for respectful and supportive discussion.
 - Everyone should have an opportunity to take it in turns to talk and be heard without being interrupted by others.
 - The debrief should not be used for criticism or expression of judgmental feelings.
2. Providing a setting for each person to communicate their feelings and experiences during and immediately following the incident, venting frustrations, validating one another's experiences and feelings, and the well-being of each person involved.
3. Establishing whether there are any critical learning points from the incident and establishing ways to implement this learning
4. Signposting staff to further support if necessary.

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The Process

It is important to start with specific questions to help channel discussion and using the suggested headings below may help to guide you through the process, moving from one stage to another.

Facts stage: How did you hear the news?
What was your first response?
How did you deal with it?
What did you do?
Other participations views

Feelings stage: What was the worst moment for you?
How did you feel when you got home?
How do you feel now about everything?

Future stage: Each group member needs a support structure
What does each person feel they need to do in terms of their own support systems?

Ending stage: If back in that situation now, how would you handle it?
What are you feeling now?
What are you taking away with you?
What help do you need?
What have you learned most from this debriefing?

It is also important that the debrief is honest and open and that shortcomings of operational systems and structures within the service are addressed.

Simplification of the process –

You don't have to use all of these questions and may find that you want to go round in a circle asking people to recall what they remember of the event or shared whatever they want to about it. You can also ask what the hardest part or worst moment was and what they found most helpful.

It can be beneficial for all team members to come together to share and witness others sharing, even if they were not present at the incident. This can be supportive for the members of the team who have been through the event, tap into any vicarious trauma people may have experienced from hearing or imagining the incident and also allow people to make links and reflect on similar distressing or challenging experiences they experienced and process any residual distress.

In this circumstance you may simply ask how those that were not present first found out about the incident, what was their reaction/response/how did it make them feel and what do they feel was managed well or that they were grateful for.