



Debriefing

Debriefing overview:

- It is a 7 phase intervention
- It includes psychological and educational benefits
- It is a structured group meeting
- It moves from cognitive processing to emotional processing back to cognitive processing
- Discussions allow for a safe (structured and rational) process of talking about survivors emotions and distress
- Through the debriefing process, participants experience others who have had similar experiences and reactions

Debriefing time and duration:

- 3-5 days after the critical incident
- 2-3 hrs. long

Location for debriefing:

- It should be done away from the crisis/disaster if possible
- It can be done in a safe facility

DEBRIEFING IS A 7 PHASE PROCESS

1st Phase-Introduction

The following information is provided to the group:

- All statements, facts, opinions and discussions made during the debriefing shall be strictly confidential
- No recordings or notes are allowed
- No one should be criticized for how they feel. Instead they should be allowed free expression of feelings with acceptance, support, and understanding from each other
- Group members are not to leave the group once it has started
- All group members need to respond to the first phase. Participation in later phases is optional
- Debriefing is **not** a critique of operations during the critical incident

IMPORTANT: *No media coverage should be allowed!*

2nd Phase-Fact Phase:

Participants are asked (response is optional):

- Who are you?
- What was your job during the incident?
- Please discuss in general facts the critical incident

IMPORTANT: This kind of questioning works for groups of 20 or fewer members, where every group member answers the same question. If the groups are larger, a different technique might be used (following more of a chronological order: So when the incident occurred: Who arrived first? Who arrived next and what happened?).

3rd Phase-Thought Phase:

Participants are asked (response is optional):

- What were your first thoughts about the incident once you got off the “autopilot” mode?

IMPORTANT: This phase personalizes the experience for the participant. It makes it part of them rather than a collection of facts outside of them.

4th Phase-Reaction Phase:

Participants are asked (response is optional):

- What was the worst part of the event for you personally?

IMPORTANT: This segment may last between 30-45 min. depending on the intensity of the event. Focus is given to participants emotions.

5th Phase-Symptom Phase:

Participants are asked (response is optional):

- What are the signs and symptoms of distress you may be experiencing?

IMPORTANT: Explain that usually there are three occurrences of signs and symptoms discussed. Those that occur

- 1) *immediately during the event, those that occur*
- 2) *during the next few days, and those that are left over and are still experienced 3-5 days after the incident*
- 3) *at the time of the debriefing*

6th Phase-Teaching Phase

- Useful information to reduce the stress at home, work, etc is provided to all participants.

7th Phase-Re-entry Phase

- Group members are prompted to ask any questions that they might have
- The group might review some portions of the critical incident that they still consider disturbing
- Group members may even bring up new issues previously not discussed

IMPORTANT: During this phase, group leaders can also provide encouragement and support. They can also ask what might be one positive thing that came out of this critical incident. It is helpful to have a resource list (phone numbers and addresses) available for each group member.

DISCLAIMER: Debriefing is a good first step for helping people process their direct involvement with traumatic events, however, counselors must have specific training in debriefing prior to engaging in any type of debriefing exercise with survivors.

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