

Safer Services - Debriefing with individuals and teams

What?

- A debrief can take many forms. A debrief can occur one to one or as a team.
- It can be something that happens immediately after an incident to offer support and ensure everyone is ok and to identify if anyone needs further support.
- Or something that happens later, to explore what happened and why, any changes or further supports that might be needed.

Why?

- Something has happened - an incident, event or issue - and the people involved would benefit from talking this through.
- It provides opportunity for people to share any impacts or things they have been holding on to.
- It can help to look at why the event happened and how to prevent it from happening again.

Where, when and how?

- Consider who needs to be included. Only include the people who were involved or impacted by the event, incident or issue (there may be value in involving others at a later date for problem solving).
- Confidentiality and the comfort of the people involved are key consideration when thinking about location. For example, people might not feel comfortable debriefing in the same place an incident took place, or in an office where people can see in.

Who should facilitate?

The person leading needs to:

- Have the skills to facilitate open discussions and at times manage conflict.
- Be able to coach a group or person to come up with solutions and outcomes.
- Be aware and present and able to recognise and guide people through this process.
- Be able to adapt questions and modify their approach.
- Have an awareness of trauma informed approaches to support.






If a serious or traumatic incident has occurred, consider whether you have the internal resources to support the team and people involved or whether you need someone who is trained to support people with critical incident debriefing.

How to structure a debrief

The process should ensure leaders and workers come together to identify key information, reflect, collaborate to develop preventative actions for the future, and provide feedback to the organisation about systemic changes required.

Note: Plan your time to debrief in advance to give yourself and the people involved time to prepare. Let people know the reason for meeting when you book the time.

Stage	Prompts and thought starters
 <p>Setting the scene Whether this is one to one or a group, it's important for the people there to introduce themselves and their role. Talk about why you have come together.</p>	<p>Possible expectations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can be done, and within what timeframe. • Voluntary participation. • Confidentiality and privacy of the people involved. • Non-judgemental language. • Time limits. <p>Possible supports</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Letting people know if they wish to leave the session, they can do this at any time. • Encouraging people to seek support after the session if they need to do so. This could be from an appropriate person within your organisation, or another appropriate person in their lives. • Having Employee Assistance Programs available to anyone who needs to access them.

	<p>Clarify details and intentions</p> <p>Help people to understand the purpose and have a shared understanding.</p>	<p>Acknowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That these conversations can be hard for everyone. <p>Explain the intention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To discuss, understand and learn, move forward, try and prevent this occurring again. <p>Give a short overview of what you know</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find out if what you know is correct, the details of what happened, who, what, where and when.
	<p>Reflections</p> <p>Allow some time for people to reflect and express their thoughts and opinions.</p>	<p>Use soft skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen more than you talk. • Be mindful of your body language, your words and tone of voice. • Be patient and let the people talk about how they are feeling. • Acknowledge people’s feelings. <p>Use open ended questions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “What are your thoughts about...” • “How do you feel now about...” • “What do you think led to this happening?”



Problem solving

Spend time developing an in-depth understanding of the reasons that could have caused the incident. This may involve asking further questions.

Summarise the issue

- Use only the facts.

Explore the learnings

- Be receptive to ideas from others, it is a collaborative process.
- Ask reflective questions with collaborative language e.g. “how could we learn from this” **not** “what could you have done better?”
- “Did our processes contribute to the issue occurring? Are any changes needed?”
- “Is there anything we should start, stop or continue doing?”
- “What could we do better to support everyone involved?”

Looking back and moving forward

Depending on the readiness of the people in the debriefing, you may choose to reflect on statements like the ones below, or leave this for a future discussion:

- “Now you can look back on this situation, what do you think you have learnt?”
- “What would we do differently if we were presented with this situation again?”



Summarise and agree on actions



Turn the reflections into practical actions.


Set some realistic expectations and boundaries

- What can be done, and within what timeframe.
- Remember it is OK to not have all the answers now and there might be expectations that will not be able to be met, further reflection and advice can be sought.
- Explain limits of confidentiality—think about what can be shared.

Talk about next steps

- Summarise the key learning and actions.
- Talk about who else needs to be involved.
- Agree on timeframes and any feedback that will be provided.

	<p>Wrap up</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thank everyone for their contributions, this is really important! • Remind people of ongoing support options. • Make a note of people who seem affected and ensure you follow up with them.
	<p>Feedback loop</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Follow through on agreed upon actions, or provide feedback to involve parties if there are delays. • Remember that feedback builds trust, and is crucial to building safer services.



This resource was adapted from Safer Services Debriefing Tool and uses the resources below as references:

- [ANZCA - Critical Incident Debriefing](#)
- [University of South Australia - Trauma informed post incident conversations](#)

Please note: This resource was developed in February 2023 by the NDS Quality and Safeguards Sector Readiness Project. The resource is general in nature and is provided as a guide only. NDS believes that the information contained in this publication is correct at the time of publishing, however, NDS reserves the right to vary any of this publication without further notice. The information provided in this publication should not be relied upon instead of other legal, medical, financial, or professional advice. Please always refer to online documents for the latest versions including the NDIS Practice Standards and advice to providers on the Code of Conduct.