

Seven Steps of the Peer Debriefing Process for Critical Incidents

(Adapted from Snelgrove, 1999)

STEP 1: Pre-debriefing Gather relevant information regarding the critical incident and the needs of the organization and individuals before beginning the debriefing process. Do a self-assessment to determine your effectiveness. Set up logistics of time and location.

STEP 2: Contact/Contract Introduce yourself. Find out what the person's understanding is of who you are and what a debriefing is (consider using FAQ re: Peer Debriefing). Help them understand the nature of a debriefing. Establish rapport.

STEP 3: Story Invite the person to describe what happened just before, during, and after the critical incident. Ask open-ended questions that help them explore the facts, thoughts, and sensory experience related to the event. Examples of questions are:

- So, what happened next?
- What were you thinking at that time?
- What did that look like?

STEP 4: Impact Potentially the most emotional point of the debriefing process— more focus on feelings than thoughts or senses. For some people it is helpful to avoid asking directly about feelings but rather to ask:

- What was the hardest part of all this for you?
- What kind of reactions or feelings were you experiencing then?

STEP 5: Symptom Education The opportunity to help the person understand that the symptoms they are experiencing are common or typical reactions to traumatic events. You can explain to the person why they are experiencing some of these symptoms. Use handouts with lists of common reactions, help them to identify the ones they are experiencing, and normalize this experience for them. Help them anticipate triggers they might experience in the future.

STEP 6: Current Functioning and Coping Create a coping plan. Explore further how they are doing now.

STEP 7: Follow-up Ask them if there is anything else they would like to talk about or ask before you end. Set up follow up time if needed or just informally check on them within the week.

Toby Snelgrove, West Vancouver, British Columbia: Easton-Snelgrove, Inc.