

Reflective Debriefing Approaches

What is Debriefing?

Debriefing refers to structured or semi-structured conversations that support reflection, learning, teamwork, wellbeing, and continuous improvement following clinical, educational, or workplace experiences.



Debriefing may occur after:

- Clinical events or procedures
- Simulations or educational activities
- Difficult team interactions
- Emotionally stressful experiences
- Near-misses or patient safety events

When approached thoughtfully, debriefing can support psychological safety, communication, teamwork, learning, and systems improvement.

Types of Debriefing

Operational or Clinical Debriefs:

Focus on workflow, communication, teamwork, and patient safety.

Educational or Reflective Debriefs:

Support learning, feedback, reflection, and professional development.

Emotional Support Debriefs:

Provide space for supportive discussion following stressful or emotionally challenging experiences.

Moral Distress Debriefs:

Explore ethical challenges, value conflicts, or experiences of powerlessness.

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Principles for Supportive Debriefing

Effective debriefing should:

- Foster psychological safety and respectful communication.
- Focus on learning, reflection, and systems improvement rather than blame.
- Encourage multiple perspectives and equitable participation.
- Clarify the purpose and structure of the discussion.
- Use trauma-informed and person-centered approaches.
- Avoid requiring individuals to disclose emotions or relive traumatic experiences.

Facilitation Considerations

Facilitators should:

- Establish respectful behavioural expectations.
- Monitor for power dynamics or dominant voices.
- Support inclusive participation and active listening.
- Recognize when additional support or follow-up may be needed.
- Maintain a developmental rather than punitive focus.