

Contents

Before you begin	vii
Topic 1 Monitor welfare of colleagues	1
1A Monitor stress and emotional wellbeing, and take action where issues arise	2
1B Acknowledge, accept and identify diverse needs of colleagues	11
1C Identify and use performance standards to monitor stress and emotional wellbeing	20
1D Use self-assessment and reflective behaviour strategies to monitor performance	35
1E Seek and act on formal and informal performance feedback	42
1F Plan to identify and develop proposals to support areas of need within the organisation	53
Summary	63
Learning checkpoint 1: Monitor welfare of colleagues	64
Topic 2 Conduct structured debriefings following an incident	69
2A Plan, prepare and conduct debriefing	70
2B Schedule debriefing as soon as possible after an incident	78
2C Conduct debriefing in a safe environment and facilitate open discussion	80
2D Use debriefing techniques to encourage exploration and reflection	83
2E Use questioning to encourage colleagues to explore and acknowledge concerns	85
2F Identify and respond to indicators of risk	89
2G Document and report outcomes of debriefings	93
2H Identify, respond, support and refer colleagues	97
Summary	104
Learning checkpoint 2: Conduct structured debriefings following an incident	105



Topic 1

In this topic you will learn how to:

- 1A Monitor stress and emotional wellbeing, and take action where issues arise**
- 1B Acknowledge, accept and identify diverse needs of colleagues**
- 1C Identify and use performance standards to monitor stress and emotional wellbeing**
- 1D Use self-assessment and reflective behaviour strategies to monitor performance**
- 1E Seek and act on formal and informal performance feedback**
- 1F Plan to identify and develop proposals to support areas of need within the organisation**

Monitor welfare of colleagues

Health and community service workers often deal with situations that are complex and challenging. They are particularly vulnerable to work-related stress and potential burnout. Supervisors must know how to identify risks to wellbeing and offer appropriate support to protect colleagues from psychological injury. Where issues develop they need to have strategies in place to assist recovery and rehabilitation.

Workplace wellbeing and supportive leadership

Research in Australia by Cotton and Hart (2002) suggests that staff wellbeing can be strongly influenced by supportive leadership. Supportive leadership is a management style that is particularly effective in situations where work is stressful, tedious or potentially dangerous. A supportive leader concentrates on reducing stress and frustration in the workplace and demonstrates behaviour that expresses concern for colleagues and an interest in their individual needs.



Monitor stress and emotional wellbeing

How can we measure welfare or wellbeing? Though there is no general agreement on the definition of these terms, there is consensus that good health is an essential component. The World Health Organization's definition of good health is a state of complete physical, social and mental wellbeing. It maintains that promotion, protection and restoration of mental health is of key concern to individuals, communities and societies.



Understand risks to mental health

Mental health as defined by the World Health Organization (2014) is more than the absence of mental disorders and disabilities. It is 'a state of wellbeing in which an individual realises his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stressors of life, can work productively and is able to make a contribution to his or her own community'.

Here are the major risks to mental health, as identified by the World Health Organization.

World Health Organization risks to mental health

- ▶ Poor physical health
- ▶ Social exclusion
- ▶ Rapid social change
- ▶ Stressful work conditions
- ▶ Gender discrimination
- ▶ Risks of violence and human rights violations

Here are some strategies for supporting colleagues at risk and for assisting rehabilitation of those recovering from stress-related illness.

Recognise signs

Recognise the early warning signs of employee distress and low morale.

Show empathy

Support the employee. Demonstrate empathy by initiating a conversation that expresses concern and allows the employee to discuss their health or other concerns in private.

Maintain contact

Contact the employee if there is an unplanned absence from work. Explore with them their reasons for non-attendance. Offer support. Stay in contact with the employee in cases of prolonged absence to maintain the connection with the workplace.

Seek assistance

If you feel unable to provide positive support to an employee, seek help from your human resources department, rehabilitation case manager or through your organisation's Employee Assistance Programs (EAP).

Be flexible

Provide flexible workplace options that enable the employee to be safe and productive at work. This could involve changes to the way the work is organised, additional support through a mentor, or adjustments to work hours or duties).

Foster participation

Ensure that the employee is fully involved in planning options and has co-ownership of job-related decisions.

Welcome and confirm

When an employee returns to work after an absence, meet them to welcome them back. Confirm that their contribution was missed and provide an update about developments in their absence. Agree on any changes to their work and how this should be communicated to the team.

Continue support

Provide ongoing support until the employee has reached their former functional level.

Source: www.comcare.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0015/41352/Early_intervention_to_support_psychological_health_and_wellbeing_PDF_2.66_MB.pdf

it is important that you do not make assumptions, positive or negative, based on a person's social, educational, linguistic, religious or cultural background, age or gender identity.

Your workplace may have specific needs related to the following cultural issues.

Beliefs and values

- ▶ Be aware of how specific religious or spiritual beliefs and value systems can influence behaviour and practice. However, there are many different varieties within major religious systems and practices, so be mindful of making assumptions. Find out what may or may not be relevant to the people you are working with. Consider how fasting rituals might influence your colleagues at various times. How could you respond?

Age

- ▶ Different cultures have different attitudes to the social significance of age or youth and the needs of young and elderly people. Respect is shown in a variety of ways. Be aware of behaviour that may be interpreted as disrespect or rudeness, or lack of caring.

Health and disability

- ▶ Your colleagues may come from backgrounds or work with people from cultural backgrounds that have very different views about treatment of people with diverse abilities and health (including mental health). Views on when, how and what to eat can also be important considerations.

Gender and sexual preference

- ▶ Work practices may need to be adapted to take into account different cultural views – some people are not comfortable with the idea of a man being alone with a single woman, or a man or woman carrying out certain tasks. Be aware of how cultural attitudes to homosexuality, transgender and non-traditional partnerships can affect members of your team, emotionally or professionally.

Workplace practices that support diversity

In many workplaces, social and cultural differences between colleagues and/or people with support needs can create tension and misunderstanding.

The following table outlines some strategies to help you deal with these situations and to help people in the workplace act with more awareness and sensitivity.

Educate and train

- ▶ Share differences and create a team culture that is respectful of differences, acknowledges that each member has their own strengths and weaknesses and that these all need your support and consideration at some point.
- ▶ Provide training or information to assist team members.

1C Identify and use performance standards to monitor stress and emotional wellbeing

Standards are broad statements of what is expected of an organisation or person. Being aware of the professional and personal standards relevant to each role in the workplace, and knowing when and how to refer to them in particular situations can help all staff avoid stress. Monitoring and reporting are vital to health and safety management. Following best practice management standards can help you monitor your organisation's effectiveness in responding to issues of stress and risks to emotional wellbeing. Monitoring how well your colleagues are performing in relation to professional and personal standards and noting absence and illness rates can alert you to issues that might pose risks to individual and general wellbeing in your workplace.



Identify areas for skills development

Evaluating a worker's skills and needs allows you to provide adequate support to them, such as administering a stress management plan following a critical incident.

Consider the following information when evaluating workers under your supervision.

Informal or formal

The evaluation may be formal or informal. Informal evaluation of skills may involve interviewing the worker about their emotional state and whether they can identify areas for development. You may also ask how they were emotionally impacted by the event, and assist the worker to identify how support can be provided. Often, an informal evaluation is followed up with a formal evaluation, such as a one-on-one meeting.

A specific template

Your organisation may provide a specific template to use to help the worker evaluate their skills and needs. Templates vary depending on whether you are providing debriefing after a critical incident, at the end of a program or during the implementation of a new program.

Ownership and participation

Encourage the worker to have ownership over the evaluation process, as this motivates them to participate in skill development and ensures they receive the support they need following the event. To encourage participation in the evaluation process, support workers to conduct critical reflection and self-evaluation.

Aims of performance appraisal

The aims of performance appraisals are to:

- ▶ provide open and honest feedback on performance
- ▶ facilitate discussion between worker and manager about mutual needs
- ▶ validate quality practices
- ▶ identify training needs
- ▶ provide a basis for workplace decisions regarding pay increases, promotion and professional development.

Post-appraisal commitments

Follow-through is imperative for ensuring any performance issues are addressed and progress is made. A manager should document the discussion and ensure the worker receives a copy and signs it. Performance appraisals can be motivational, uplifting and positive experiences when handled well, and allow you to address performance issues in a fair and non-discriminatory way.

Integrating with professional development

Supervision meetings and performance appraisals should be used to identify areas for development. Feedback should be constructive and work both ways, so it is an opportunity for improvement for employee and managers. Goals and limitations to achieving those goals should be discussed and actions to achieve the goals agreed to by both supervisor and worker. Such actions might include:

- ▶ further training
- ▶ updating knowledge about legislation, standards, policies and procedures
- ▶ arranging mentoring.

Monitor and manage stress and emotional wellbeing

Initial efforts to monitor stress and emotional wellbeing in the workplace have focused on recognising and managing individual personal risk. This is in line with legal and ethical requirements that recognise the rights of workers to be protected from psychological injury and to receive support for recovery and rehabilitation when injury does occur. More recent research suggests that the most effective way to approach stress management in the workplace is to take a holistic approach, where organisational factors that can contribute to psychological injury are also addressed. Using management standards can help to monitor an organisation's approach to managing stress and workplace wellbeing.



Monitoring and managing the wellbeing of groups within the organisation can lead to the development and implementation of organisation wide measures, such as ensuring appropriate and diverse workloads and building a workplace culture that normalises the risks of secondary trauma, making it easier for individuals to talk about and get support for.

Breaching ethics

A worker may breach ethics knowingly or unknowingly. If this happens, you should refer to the code of conduct or ethical guidelines for your industry to determine whether the issue is an ethical dilemma. Note that ethical dilemmas are not legal issues. If the breach has legal implications, you need to take appropriate action, such as reporting it to the relevant authority.

Examples of ethical breaches

- ▶ The worker has a sexual relationship with the person with support needs.
- ▶ The worker lies.
- ▶ The worker discusses the personal issues of an individual with support needs with somebody unrelated to the work context about.
- ▶ The worker has been spending the money of individual with support needs on the behalf of the individual, without their consent.

Manage complex ethical issues and dilemmas

Community services workers are likely to face a number of ethical dilemmas in the course of their work. An example of this kind of dilemma is supporting a person with care needs who wants to have a baby, even though they have been medically advised not to.

Workers may need to choose between two or more morally acceptable courses of action or between equally unacceptable alternatives. If there is a legal aspect to the issue, it is not an ethical dilemma. A situation of this type can be resolved by following legal means, such as reporting or recording.

Workers can refer to their job description to confirm their rights and responsibilities and the boundaries of their work role, which will enable them to work ethically and handle situations that are difficult or distressing.

Here are some principles to follow.

Principles for dealing with ethical dilemmas

- ▶ When in doubt about what to do, always put the welfare of people with support needs first.
- ▶ Strive to be fair and show respect to all service users and workers.
- ▶ Keep personal problems private during work times.
- ▶ Respect service users' right to privacy.
- ▶ Consider situations from the point of view others.

Management Standard 3: Support

This standard includes the encouragement, sponsorship and resources provided by the organisation, line management and colleagues.

Standard:

- ▶ Employees indicate that they receive adequate information and support from their colleagues and superiors.
- ▶ Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

How to achieve this standard:

- ▶ The organisation has policies and procedures to adequately support employees.
- ▶ Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to support their staff.
- ▶ Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to support their colleagues.
- ▶ Employees know what support is available and how and when to access it.
- ▶ Employees know how to access the required resources to do their job.
- ▶ Employees receive regular and constructive feedback.

Management Standard 4: Relationships

This standard includes promoting positive working to avoid conflict and dealing with unacceptable behaviour.

Standard:

- ▶ Employees indicate that they are not subjected to unacceptable behaviours, such as bullying at work.
- ▶ Systems are in place locally to respond to any individual concerns.

How to achieve this standard:

- ▶ The organisation has policies and procedures to adequately support employees.
- ▶ Systems are in place to enable and encourage managers to support their staff.
- ▶ Systems are in place to enable and encourage employees to support their colleagues.
- ▶ Employees know what support is available and how and when to access it.
- ▶ Employees know how to access the required resources to do their job.
- ▶ Employees receive regular and constructive feedback.

Identify your limitations

Here are some areas where, on reflection, you may identify limitations and need for development. If a worker you are supervising is dealing with complex issues that go beyond your field of expertise or experience, you may need to seek advice and supervision from another colleague or refer the person to a service that can provide specialised assistance from a qualified practitioner.

Here are some areas in which you may experience limitations.

Areas in which you may have limitations

1

Personal behaviour

You may find it difficult to wait and remain calm when in conflict.

2

Personality traits

You may find it difficult to:

- ▶ adapt to change
- ▶ understand the ideas of others
- ▶ develop extended relationships
- ▶ trust others.

3

Learning styles

You may prefer one learning style over another. One of the most common categorisations of learning styles is Fleming's VARK model, which identifies the following types of learners:

- ▶ Visual learners
- ▶ Auditory learners
- ▶ Reading-writing preference learners
- ▶ Kinaesthetic learners or tactile learners

4

Professional standards

You may find it difficult to:

- ▶ actively seek professional development opportunities
- ▶ seek, analyse and reflect on feedback
- ▶ seek opportunities for supervision and mentoring
- ▶ identify and participate in personal development
- ▶ integrate learning into improved practice.

5

Emotions

You may find it difficult to:

- ▶ remain impartial
- ▶ maintain professional boundaries
- ▶ understand all of your feelings.

Identify the organisation's supervision practices and procedures

It is important to identify the organisation's practices and procedures that relate to supporting staff. Consider these points on supervision practices.

Appropriate or required supervision model

- ▶ The organisation you work for and the individuals the organisation supports largely determine the supervision model, practices and procedures that are used. For example:
 - In social work, Kadushin's model of supervision is commonly used.
 - In counselling, orientation-specific models (the psychodynamic approach) are more commonly used as these approaches relate to counselling techniques and practices.

Choosing the appropriate supervision model

- ▶ You may be encouraged to use a range of supervision models and practices; for example, you may use a strengths-based model to work collaboratively with a worker, but a developmental model for the supervision process. It may be also appropriate to offer one-on-one supervision and peer group supervision.

Being supportive, educational and administrative

- ▶ Whatever model you choose, supervision processes must be supportive, educational and administrative. A person who facilitates workplace debriefing and support processes should also have the correct qualifications and experience in the field they are supervising, so they are adequately equipped to fulfil the role.

Performance appraisals

A performance appraisal is a tool for measuring your performance against selected criteria. The criteria will provide a measure for the quality of performance, as well as the quantity (for example, meeting specific targets). Ideally, appraisals are a positive experience and provide you with open and honest feedback on your progress since the last meeting. You should welcome the chance to discuss mutual needs with your manager and to seek validation of what you are doing. Any serious performance issues should be discussed separately from performance appraisals in specific counselling sessions.



Types of feedback

You can seek feedback on the effectiveness of your supervision at various times and in various ways. You may receive feedback formally, though a pre-arranged meeting or informally, perhaps as a result of non-verbal communication that leads to questions on your part.

Example

Improve your ability to give feedback

Learning the guidelines for giving and receiving feedback should help you feel confident about giving feedback and accepting it from others.

Here are examples of ways you can improve your ability to give feedback.

Be specific

Make sure the feedback you give is specific. Saying, 'I appreciate that you always write your case notes promptly, but sometimes you don't explain what you mean. If you say you have noticed behavioural changes in a person with support needs, I need details of the types of behaviour changes you have noticed' – this tells the recipient what they need to do and offers positive feedback at the same time.

If a colleague gives you feedback and you are unsure what they are saying, ask them to clarify what they mean or to provide specific examples of the performance, actions or behaviour they are commenting on.

Be constructive

Avoid purely critical or negative, and never give feedback as a way of humiliating or belittling your co-workers. Try to make positive comments before providing feedback about what they need to improve.

Constructive feedback allows the recipient to feel supported and respected. Always try to convey that you respect and value the person and are sensitive to their goals and needs. If a co-worker makes comments that are personal, you have the right to tell them that you will only accept feedback that focuses on your skills and performance and if it is given in a respectful manner.

Ensure feedback is timely

Try to give feedback as soon as possible following the time the behaviour or work practice you are discussing occurred. It is not helpful to say, 'Mrs Jones told me last month that you never follow up or get back to her about other services that she is eligible for. It's too late now because she has left.'

It is always better to point out problems or oversights at the time they occur so the feedback recipient can correct the issue themselves, or make sure they do not repeat the same mistake

Be clear and direct

Some people are uncomfortable giving feedback so they 'beat around the bush' and do not state exactly what they mean. This is very confusing for everyone. Work out what you want to say before you say it and give your feedback in a clear and concise way so the recipient can easily understand what you mean.

If you are not sure what someone means when they are giving you feedback, ask questions until you do understand. Seek clarification and examples of the behaviour or practice so you know what areas you need to improve.

Here Professor Jennifer Middleton compares burnout and secondary trauma.



Secondary trauma

- ▶ May occur either as a result of a single exposure or traumatic event
- ▶ May contribute to burnout
- ▶ Has a faster recovery rate
- ▶ Affects the individual worker
- ▶ Comes from the helper's relationship with a traumatised individual
- ▶ Steps can be taken to reduce secondary trauma (e.g. intentional self-care strategies)
- ▶ Often be addressed and treated while staff remain on the job



Burnout

- ▶ A process that develops over time
- ▶ May have various causes
- ▶ Can occur independently of or with secondary trauma
- ▶ Often an organisational problem, not individual, but can be both
- ▶ Systematic factors, like poor supervision or lack of resources often contribute
- ▶ Organisations can take steps to reduce burnout (e.g. re-organise work, encourage staff leave)
- ▶ The cure may be to quit the job

Source: Middleton, J (2015) 'Addressing Secondary Trauma and Compassion Fatigue in Work with Older Veterans: An Ethical Imperative', *New Journal of Geriatric Care Management* Spring 2015.

Plan emotional resilience training

As the incidence of burnout is particularly high in workers in the health and community services sector, governments and professional organisations now recognise an urgent need to educate staff about methods of emotional resilience and harm prevention strategies.

Here are some useful resources to help you propose education and training solutions.

Stress and burnout: a prevention handbook

- ▶ Australia's National Research Centre on the Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) workplace has identified the key factors that are likely to impact stress and burnout for AOD workers and also describes practical strategies to alleviate or prevent these conditions.
- ▶ You can read more about this at: <http://nceta.flinders.edu.au/files/2412/5548/1890/EN114.pdf>.

Burnout self-care kit

- ▶ The NSW government's Family and Community Services department has devised a burnout self-care kit for support workers subject to high levels of prolonged stress, such as those involved in case management and support of homeless people.

Monitor the effectiveness of action taken

- ▶ Hazard management should be ongoing, and actions and policies should be constantly reviewed to take note of new hazards and changing conditions.

Source: *Violence, Aggression and Bullying at Work* (2010), www.commerce.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/atoms/files/code_violence.pdf

Develop action plans

Once you have identified potential risks, evaluated the likely harm and discussed your findings with your colleagues, it is time to record them and develop and implement plans of action. When drawing up your action plans, consider how you intend to evaluate each action and how you will know whether it has been successful.

Responses to identified risk include:

- ▶ giving specific groups more control over aspects of their work
- ▶ improving communication between groups and management
- ▶ providing development opportunities for interpersonal skills
- ▶ analysing tasks or review jobs using the Management Standards framework
- ▶ updating a policy or procedure that has failings.

Write proposals

When risk analysis and reviews of incidents and staff wellbeing indicate the need for additional support within an organisation, evidence needs to be provided to muster support and funding for training or changes.

The format of the proposal may include information in differing amounts of detail, depending on the forum in which it is being examined. If it is for external consideration, statements linking the proposal with the mission of the organisation may be necessary; however, it would not be necessary for a managers' meeting. The organisation may have a template document for certain kinds of proposals.

Here are some elements generally incorporated into written proposals.

Elements of a written proposal

- ▶ A description of the situation or issue
- ▶ Proposed solutions
- ▶ Steps involved in implementing these solutions
- ▶ Benefits of making these changes
- ▶ Potential obstacles

- ▶ whether the strategies used to stop the behaviour were effective or require improvement
- ▶ the impact of the incident on the individual and others
- ▶ how well did the organisational procedures work
- ▶ improvements that can be made when managing similar incidents.

Conduct a debrief

Debriefing sessions can be conducted by the organisation itself in a peer-to-peer support model or a staff team model. Staff must be trained and skilled in managing the sensitivities and support required of staff in what could have been a stressful and highly emotional situation. Some larger organisations may employ experts outside of their workplace to come and run debriefing sessions. These are more likely to be professionals with skills and experience in these situations. The model used will depend on the critical incident and the requirements of staff determined by the management of the organisation.

Here is more information on different types of debriefing.

External provider model

- ▶ Debriefing sessions are provided by trained health professionals who specialise in debriefing and counselling.
- ▶ The service is paid for by the organisation.
- ▶ The support offered by the practitioners should align with organisational policies and procedures.

Staff debriefing team model

- ▶ Debriefing is conducted by other staff members that have been trained to debrief.
- ▶ Staff debriefing needs to ensure confidentiality and should be conducted in a safe environment.
- ▶ The person conducting the debriefing in this model must be aware of the limits of their skills and refer to professionals as required.

Peer support model

- ▶ Peer support is offered by the staff with training, who conducts debriefing under the supervision of more experienced trained debriefers.
- ▶ Peer support may be offered in conjunction with other support.
- ▶ The person conducting the debriefing in this model must be aware of the limits of their skills and refer to professionals as required.

Psychological debriefing models

Some organisations offer debriefing training to staff so that they have employees prepared and trained to offer debriefing sessions as required. There will be courses available to upskill staff and provide them with the knowledge and skills in conducting a session at the workplace with their peers. Training is offered in various forms, but

Qualities of a person debriefing a group

Although debriefing is not therapy and debriefers do not need to be mental health practitioners or professional counselors, they should do some training. Many in-house debriefing training occurs by sitting in and observing sessions with more experienced facilitators. Many training courses offer opportunities for scenarios and practice in simulated sessions.

A person conducting a debriefing should be able to provide a safe, trusting atmosphere and demonstrate an empathic understanding of what people have experienced. They also need the communication and leadership skills to guide the discussion and allow every person to feel they have been given the opportunity to contribute. Debriefers should respect what is said by participants, be open and honest and have the capacity to observe what is happening in the group dynamic while giving their attention to one person.



Maintain a safe environment

Heated discussion or conflict can develop within a debriefing session due to the nature of the stressful situation that has occurred and the emotions that may be elevated. The facilitator needs to be able to allow feelings to be expressed and for everyone to be heard and give their account. It is important that one person is not allowed to dominate or intimidate others into not participating. Every person attending should be able to get some benefit from the session. Using active and reflective listening communication techniques helps maintain a respectful relationship between participants.

Active listening means paying close attention and focusing on not only hearing what a person is saying, but observing and interpreting what is being communicated, both verbally and nonverbally. It involves responding to the speaker to clarify information and paraphrasing what the person has said to encourage the speaker to continue.

Here are some useful phrases that can be used to clarify information and understanding.

Useful phrases for clarification	
▶ Do you mean ...	▶ From your point of view ...
▶ Let me see if I understand ...	▶ I wonder if ...
▶ Correct me if I am wrong ...	▶ Do you mean ...
▶ As I hear it ...	▶ Let me see if I understand ...

Closed questions

- ▶ Close-ended questions seek specific, concrete information. They are designed to elicit specific yes or no responses. They usually begin with verbs such as: do; did; does; can; have; had; will; are; is; and was.
- ▶ This type of questioning can be used to obtain specific information that will help make a fast assessment of what is occurring.

Encourage exploration and acknowledgement

In some circumstances the participants may not feel comfortable talking about their reactions and emotions, perhaps because they feel ashamed or angry, or are in fear that they have done the wrong thing and will be accountable for what happened. It is important to understand that the reactions people have are individual and will be based on their life experience and background up until the incident.

Those with a personal history of trauma, losses or personal issues may feel particularly vulnerable when faced with certain kinds of incident and the debriefing may make them feel vulnerable and on-the-spot, which can be extra stressful for them. Debriefing questioning should not focus on individual emotions for too long, but allow the person to acknowledge that they exist and that they are likely to be shared with others who experienced the same incident.



A questioning framework

Here is an outline of a questioning framework that could be used when conducting a debriefing session.

Facts

- ▶ What do we know about what happened?
- ▶ What were the first signs?

Feelings

- ▶ How do you feel about the events that happened?
- ▶ What emotional impact did it have on you?
- ▶ What was your emotional state at the time of the incident?

Future planning

- ▶ What would you like to see happen next?
- ▶ What ongoing support do you feel would be useful?

2G Document and report outcomes of debriefings

Organisations have various requirements for the storage of records and documents. When a debriefing exercise has been completed, staff may be asked if they are willing to contribute to a review of the organisation's performance in the aftermath of an incident. The outcomes of a review may indicate areas for improvement. The performance of how the organisations assisted and supported staff or areas in training might become obvious if staff were not equipped with skills to be able to deal with critical incidents. As a result of a review or evaluation, the policies and procedures should be reviewed and updated to reflect the improvements required in managing workplace safety.



Requirements for reporting

WHS legislation requires reporting of all incidents or emergencies. The *Work Health and Safety Act* (2011) provides details of which incidents are serious and therefore 'notifiable' by the organisation or a person with identified responsibility to notify. The WHS regulator organisation can provide assistance on this as required.

Once completed, records should be stored in accordance with the organisation's administrative record-keeping guidelines. These should include rules around confidentiality and limits to access to confidential information to protect a person's privacy. Electronic or digital storage generally offers password protection. There are community service standards and organisational policies that will describe the need and process to maintain confidentiality and privacy.

Keeping records of attendance during debriefing is necessary, but confidentiality and freedom to speak freely is essential in the process and the details of the session of what was discussed would generally not be recorded.



Prepare a report

As with other reports in the community services sector, reports should be brief and use clear, concise and factual language and meet organisational guidelines for style and safe storage. The writing should be objective and non-judgemental.

Here is an example of the type of information you may find in a supervision report completed after an emergency incident.

Support networks

- ▶ Many workplaces have staff members who help others when they need advice or support. These individuals offer their time to any staff member who needs help in recovery from an incident. The service is confidential and may provide referrals to appropriate health professionals if necessary.

Counselling

- ▶ Counsellors are trained to listen and help people identify options for dealing with stress and other difficult situations and incidents in their life.

Psychology

- ▶ Psychology services may be required by workers who have been unable to return to work after an incident and who have had to make major changes in their lives as a result of the incident. Psychologists provide emotional and psychological support to individuals. This service needs referral from a medical practitioner.

Doctors

- ▶ A worker may require a referral to a doctor if there has been a physical injury or emotional harm.

Employee assistance programs

Many organisations offer a program called an employee assistance program (EAP). EAPs provide confidential online or face-to-face counselling to support employee's wellbeing. These programs are often operated through the human resources department and include services not required on an everyday basis, but can be accessed as required by an external organisation. Counselling and conflict resolution services are commonly available in an EAP. The organisation funds these services and the assistance is confidential.

Some individuals have pre-existing vulnerabilities or other problems that may surface as a result of an incident and become aggravated by it. These problems should not be dealt with in debriefing sessions, but referred to suitable trained mental health professionals. Where signs emerge of more serious risk of prolonged reaction to trauma, clinical referrals to mental health and trauma specialists may be required.

Clinical referrals should be considered when:

- ▶ a debriefing has not led to a reduction of stress reactions
- ▶ new symptoms appear after debriefing
- ▶ continuing high levels of anxiety or distress are evident
- ▶ a person demonstrates fear of the workplace or inability to function effectively
- ▶ a colleague experiences continued disruption of home life due to the incident
- ▶ a colleague exhibits bitterness, cynicism or low morale.

Summary

1. Debriefing sessions must be planned and prepared for in line with organisational protocols.
2. Policies and procedures relevant to community services sector should specify that debriefing is available to staff.
3. Debriefing sessions can be conducted by the organisation itself, or experts outside of the workplace may come and run debriefing sessions.
4. Trauma from serious incidents requires special treatment by professional mental health specialists. If not attended to, stress and burnout also can result in injury that requires professional treatment.
5. The development of policies and procedures for managing psychological injury is an important part of preparation for incidents that affect workers. Debriefing services can be detailed and outlined in these documents.
6. Debriefing gives participants the opportunity to discover that their reactions and emotional responses to a crisis were not uncommon.
7. Managers need to react immediately after an incident to ensure staff receive support as soon as possible.
8. Facilitators can help to create a safe environment for open discussion by explaining the aims and purpose of the debriefing at the outset of the session.
9. Debriefing techniques used will vary according to the group dynamics, the training and experience of the person running the session, and the severity of the effects on the participants in the group.
10. Debriefing gives participants the opportunity to discover that their reactions and emotional responses to a crisis were not uncommon.
11. A risk assessment means that the organisation and the staff can be fully aware of the risks they are undertaking and plan to manage that risk.
12. The *WHS Act* provides details of which incidents are serious and therefore 'notifiable' by the organisation or a person with identified responsibility to notify.
13. Incidents of concern must be reviewed and reported, but psychological debriefing sessions should be confidential.
14. In the case of trauma where the person/s has experienced a deeply distressing or disturbing experience, a professional must replace the debriefing facilitator and the person must be referred.
15. Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) provide confidential online or face-to-face counselling to support employee wellbeing.
16. An organisation's dispute resolution policy is an important document to access when a conflict or dispute needs to be will be resolved.