



Debriefing Strategies & Resources

The privilege of our professional lives as healthcare members is bearing witness to the lives of our patients and their families – their joys and sufferings. No matter what professional role we have in the healthcare team, all of us share a common need and responsibility for debriefing.

Debriefing is intentional, respectful and bounded sharing that promotes release of stress and problem solving. Upon self-reflection, individuals may identify their need for external support, such as counselling. Facilitating debriefing is not resigned to certain professional roles – all healthcare professional types can benefit from skill in debriefing.

Debriefing is not unnecessary sharing of traumatic or personal details for shock-value or to bolster oneself. Debriefing does not involve counselling or psychotherapy.

Informal Debriefing Techniques

Debriefing is often needed “in the moment”, as you metabolize a difficult or traumatic situation before moving onto care for another patient/family. An easily practiced and effective technique that can be used amongst all colleagues is [Low-Impact Debriefing](#).

Formal Debriefing Techniques

Formal debriefing can occur on a regular or ad hoc basis. Formal debriefing is most effective when all necessary team members participate. Administration or management have the responsibility to support and/or facilitate formal debriefing opportunities, ensuring that all appropriate team members are invited, maintaining the safety, confidentiality and purpose of the space and discussion, taking away organizational or system issues and ensuring that the discussion concludes with tangible next steps. Furthermore, they have a responsibility to ensure staff are supported in accessing personal supports, like private counselling or medical care if the need arises.

Regular Debriefing Teams find benefit in implementing regular debriefing opportunities. The Center to Advance Palliative Care (US) recently released two training videos on [Wellbeing Debriefing](#) for health care organizations. The Canadian Quality Palliative Care in Long Term Care (QPC-LTC) Alliance offers a useful module to support formalized [Peer-Led Debriefing](#) practices, which can be applied to teams in other healthcare sectors. Teams that support patients at the end of life experience the conclusion of therapeutic relationships with the patient and their family by death, rather than discharge. Regular bereavement debriefing can be beneficial to offer staff space to acknowledge the events of the death and to retroactively discuss any issues that arose. Canadian Virtual Hospice offers a helpful [Bereavement Debriefing Guide](#).

Ad-hoc Debriefing In the wake of a challenging experience or critical event, debriefing is necessary to support the wellbeing of those involved, to identify gaps and to find solutions that properly address those gaps – preventing them from impacting the care of patients and their families in the future. An example of effective event debriefing with a healthcare team, for any sector, shortened by the Supporting a Palliative Approach in LTC project (SPA-LTC), “[Reflective Debriefing: Supporting people and practice in LTC](#)” training video.

Resources

- Better Health Channel. (2021). [Workplace safety: coping with a critical incident](#).
- Center to Advance Palliative Care (CAPC). (2021). [Learn How to Facilitate Wellbeing Debriefings within Your Organization: Parts 1 & 2](#).
- Tend Academy. (2019). [Low Impact Debriefing](#).
- Quality Palliative Care in Long Term Care (QPC-LTC) Alliance (2013). [Peer Led Debriefing Toolkit: Guidelines for Promoting Effective Grief Support Among Front Line Staff](#).
- WWIHPC, CMHA and HPC Consultation Services, WW (2021). [Supporting Staff Through a Pandemic: A Toolkit for Congregate Care Settings \(Debriefing section\)](#).