



Description of a Stress Debriefing Session

Critical incident group debriefing (CIGD) is a process used to intentionally respond to a traumatic incident. It is a facilitated conversation in which a group who has gone through a traumatic event has the opportunity to talk about their experiences. The facilitators normalize and validate the group's experiences and provide resources in which to better promote psychological healing. This is a psychoeducational process, not therapeutic treatment.

CIGD normally occurs shortly after the event (between one day and two weeks following) and is often a one-time meeting lasting about one to two hours. It is not a stand-alone intervention; rather, it is one consideration amongst other interventions that a school or community might use to support each other. CIGD consists of four stages: an introduction to the process, an exploration of what happened and the impact on current coping, teaching common reactions after an incident and coping strategies, and a closing.

Additional research is needed on the efficacy of debriefing after a traumatic event. The general consensus is that careful consideration must be made to ensure that debriefing is appropriate given the needs of participants and specifics of the traumatic event. The debriefing process must start with careful selection of groups to avoid further harm. Groups should be homogeneously chosen based on exposure to the incident and relationship types, and ideally no more than 15 to a group. For instance, mental health providers that directly responded to the crisis should process in a group separate from educators who may have learned of the incident second hand.

Staff from the Crisis Response Unit in the Office of School Safety have been trained in Critical Incident Group Debriefing and they would like to share their knowledge and experience. If your district does not have mental health professionals trained to do this, staff from the Crisis Response Unit are happy to come and assist.

If you have additional questions, please feel free to contact Kati Garner (303-909-3672), Crisis Response Unit Manager.