

SINGLE EVENT DEFUSING May 2010

Following a traumatic event, a defusing will provide initial intervention. Defusings are easy to direct and although they are not time consuming, the results can be very powerful. Providing a defusing for involved employees will assist you in determining whether or not a debriefing is appropriate. It is okay to do a defusing for an incident that does not require a debriefing. The defusing is aimed at a small working group which experienced a traumatic event together. Defusings are conversational in tone.

For best results, the defusing should be held within eight hours of the incident, and preferably even sooner. The shorter the time frame between the ending of the event and the beginning of the defusing, the better the results are likely to be. It should take no more than an hour.

Most often, defusings are led by peer support personnel. On a fire, this person could be the Human Resource Specialist who has been trained to facilitate a defusing, or it could be facilitated by a debriefer.

During the defusing process, there is no pressure on the participants to discuss anything which they wish to avoid. If the responses get too deep and personal, the leader will shift the focus of the questioning to lighter questions. **Powerful work should be done during the debriefing process**, not the defusing. Individuals who need to be directed away from severely deep responses serve as an indicator that a debriefing is appropriate.

A DEFUSING is an informal, initial debriefing which occurs within a few hours post incident. It is usually conducted by peers and may occur quite spontaneously.

- It should be positive, caring and supportive of the participants.
- This is not the time for a critique, but an opportunity to ensure basic needs are being met and for those involved to share how they are doing right now.
- Try to find a space that is comfortable, low stimuli, and won't be interrupted.
- Keep the tone positive, accepting, and understanding.
- When someone is talking, be respectful and hold your comments until they have finished.
- Have people speak only for themselves. Let others tell their own stories.

- Be attentive, compassionate listeners and focus on what the speaker is saying AND experiencing.
- Respect the privacy of the participants.

End the defusing when everyone has had time to speak. The group will notice when they are winding down and ready to stop. This is a good time to talk about CIS symptoms and what they may experience over the next few days. It is sometimes helpful and encouraging if the participants can state how they plan to take good care of themselves.

Here are some common signs and signals of stress reactions.

<i>Physical</i>	<i>Cognitive</i>	<i>Emotional</i>	<i>Behavioral</i>
chills	confusion	fear	withdrawal
thirst	nightmares	guilt	antisocial acts
fatigue	uncertainty	grief	can't rest
nausea	hyper vigilance	panic	pacing
fainting	suspiciousness	denial	speech change
twitches	intrusive images	anxiety	lost appetite
vomiting	blaming someone	agitation	alcohol use
dizziness	poor problem solving	irritability	
weakness	attention/decisions	depression	
chest pains	poor memory	intense anger	
headaches	poor concentration	apprehension	
rapid heart rate	changed alertness	overwhelmed	
muscle tremors			
shock symptoms			
visual difficulties			
profuse sweating			
difficulty breathing			

Formal debriefings occur within 24 to 72 hours after the critical incident. A CISD is specifically designed to reduce the impact of the critical incident and to accelerate the normal recovery from an abnormal event. The CISD can be led by specially trained peer support people and include mental health professionals. The participants are encouraged to express their feelings and reactions to the incident and the debriefing is structured to facilitate that process.

Remember, that a defusing usually happens prior to an investigation. In a defusing, we just want people to share how they are doing right now, we don't need facts. We should remind participants not to say anything that they don't want brought forward in a possible investigation.

DEFUSING INFORMATION FOR SUSTAINED WORK ASSIGNMENTS

FIVE QUESTIONS:

1. Task Related Question: “What job have you been assigned to?”
2. A Grounding Question: One Related to Family or Home: “When was the last time you talked to your family?”
3. A Group Related Question: “What will your team be doing on this shift?”
4. A Personal Question: “What are you doing that helps you get through this?”
5. A Task Related Question: “What will you be doing when you leave here?”