

The Post-Crisis Debrief

A short, structured debrief for teams after a difficult incident

Do not let the only question after a crisis be “What went wrong?”

A useful debrief separates immediate safety, facts, staff experience, system conditions, and learning. It is not an investigation, therapy session, or disciplinary meeting. Use it when people are regulated enough to think clearly and follow your organization’s required reporting and safety procedures first.

BEFORE YOU DEBRIEF

Address urgent medical or safety needs first. Complete required notifications and documentation. Make sure participants have enough regulation and privacy to reflect without being forced to relive the event.

1. WHAT HAPPENED?

Stick first to observable facts. What happened before, during, and immediately after the incident?

What do we know? What are we assuming? What information is still missing?

2. WHAT HELPED?

Identify actions, conditions, relationships, or decisions that reduced risk or supported recovery.

What should we intentionally repeat next time?

3. WHAT INCREASED THE LOAD?

Look beyond individual behavior. Consider environment, timing, crowding, communication, staffing, unclear roles, demands, sensory load, or policy.

What made regulation or safe response harder than it needed to be?

4. WHAT DID STAFF NEED?

Name the impact without requiring disclosure. Consider relief, coverage, information, time, supervision, peer support, or follow-up.

What support is needed now - not just what would have been nice?

5. WHAT CHANGES NEXT TIME?

Choose one or two realistic changes in practice, environment, communication, staffing, planning, or leadership response.

Who owns each change, and by when?

After the Crisis

Capture what the team learned and what will change

WHAT WE KNOW

Write only what can be reasonably established from observation, documentation, or direct report.

WHAT HELPED

Name specific actions or conditions worth repeating.

WHAT MADE IT HARDER

Identify system, environment, communication, workload, role, or timing factors.

WHAT PEOPLE NEED NOW

List immediate and follow-up supports. Do not assume everyone needs the same thing.

WHAT WE WILL CHANGE

Choose 1-2 changes, assign an owner, and identify when they will be reviewed.

KEEP THE FUNCTIONS SEPARATE

A reflective debrief should not replace mandated reporting, formal incident review, clinical care, employee assistance, investigation, or disciplinary processes when those are required.