

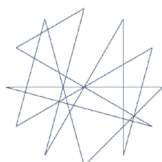
SECURITY INCIDENT INFORMATION MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK

TOOL 6: HOW TO CONDUCT A FACTUAL DEBRIEF



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TOOL 6: HOW TO CONDUCT A FACTUAL DEBRIEF

The factual debriefing process should begin after arranging for first aid or medical treatment (physical and psychological) for the involved person(s). When organising a factual debriefing for information collection purposes, it is nonetheless important to keep basic principles of psychological first aid (PFA) in mind: debriefing when basic physical and psychological security has been ensured, creating a safe space, empowering the survivor, clarity about the process, expectations and follow-up actions, etc.³⁸

A factual debriefing should not be confused with an emotional debrief (also known as defusing). A traumatic event should be addressed by professionals or trained staff providing PFA.

The information below is not an attempt to train readers on PFA, or on becoming professional investigators. It is a list of tips to conduct safe and useful interviews for fact-finding, in the scope of incident reporting purposes.

When starting a factual debriefing, remind everyone involved that the purpose of the debriefing is to learn and prevent, not to find fault.

Preparing for a debriefing:

- Identify who is conducting the debrief.
- Identify who is debriefed; organisational procedures should define if the staff involved in the incident should be debriefed together or separately. The procedure can state this is a choice that is to be made on a case by case basis, depending on the event's nature and logistical constraints. While organising a collective debrief clearly presents advantages (logistical, but also for the capture of the narrative), it can also lead to the incident being 're-written' and facts altered (witnesses and victims influence each other, their perceptions vary, staff may fear giving opinions on causes and responsibilities in front of others, etc.).
- Inform the debriefed individual(s) of who is going to be present during the debriefing.
- Identify a safe space for the debriefing to take place. Pick a secure and convenient location for the individual, such as a conference room or private office.

³⁸ For further information on PFA, see guidelines from the World Health Organisation [here](#).

- Allow the debriefed person to suggest the best time for the debriefing (taking other constraints into account), in line with your organisation's reporting procedures.
- Prepare your questions; questions can follow the incident reporting template and cover the same items. You might not need to ask them during the interview but they will guide you if needed. They must be open-ended questions.
- Practice self-awareness by identifying your own potential biases and putting them aside while conducting the debriefing. Analysis will come later.

Debriefing steps:

1. Conduct the interview in a quiet and private place. Put the individual at ease when they arrive and offer a glass of water, tea or coffee. Make sure they are not tired and have been emotionally debriefed.
2. State that the purpose of the debriefing is fact-finding, not fault-finding.
3. Do not promise confidentiality, but tell the individual that you will share information with only those who need to know.
4. Provide the individual with a rough estimate of the amount of time the debriefing will take.
5. Ask the individual to recount their version of what happened without interrupting. Take notes or record their responses.
6. Ask clarifying questions to fill in missing information. Use open-ended questions.
7. Recount the information obtained back to the interviewee. Correct any inconsistencies.
8. Ask the individual what they think could have prevented the incident, focusing on the conditions and events preceding the event. This can help with the analysis.
9. Avoid expressing your thoughts, opinions or conclusions about the incident or what the individual says.
10. Inform the interviewee about the next steps.
11. Thank the individual.
12. Finish documenting the debriefing by completing the incident report template.

Examples of open-ended questions:

- Where were you at the time of the incident?
- What were you doing at the time?
- What did you observe that could have been unusual?
- What did you see or hear?
- What were the environmental conditions (weather, light, noise, etc.) at the time?
- What was (were) the injured worker(s) doing at the time?
- In your opinion, what caused the incident?
- How, in your opinion, might similar incidents be prevented in the future?
- Were any other witnesses around? Do you know the names of other witnesses?
- How are you connected with others involved in the incident?
- What other details would you like to share?

What to avoid:

- Intimidating, interrupting or judging the individual.
- Assisting the individual in answering questions.
- Asking leading questions.
- Asking multiple questions at the same time.
- Becoming emotionally involved.
- Jumping to conclusions.
- Revealing discoveries of the investigation.
- Making promises that cannot be kept.

Analysis:

In order to empower the individual and give them the opportunity to share insightful comments, it is suggested you ask them for their incident analysis during the debriefing. Nonetheless, remember their judgment can be impacted by the traumatic event. The causes of the incident will have to be analysed by the person completing the incident report. The purpose of the fact-finding debriefing is to determine all the contributing factors to why the incident occurred.

The following questions may help in your analysis of the contributing factors:

- Was a hazardous condition a contributing factor?
- Was the location a contributing factor?
- Was the procedure a contributing factor?
- Was lack of personal protective equipment or emergency equipment a contributing factor?
- Were the SOPs a contributing factor, and should they be updated to reflect a new reality on the ground?
- Were the team dynamics a contributing factor, and how do you feel we could improve this?

Statements such as 'staff were careless' or 'the employee did not follow safety procedures', 'wrong time, wrong place' do not get at the root cause of an incident. To avoid these misleading conclusions, focus on why the incident occurred, e.g. 'Why did the employee not follow safety procedures?'