

Crisis Response Team Debriefing Session Overview

The HBCD Crisis Response Team under the direction of Pastor Kip Hamby in consultation with Dr. Gary Nordick has developed the following process to deploy in the event a traumatic crisis strikes our local church body. The process consists of debrief groups of up to 12 people led by a two person facilitator team. The facilitators will lead 60-90 minute discussions based on questions designed to help the group members articulate the personal impact of the recent event. Healing from traumatic events occurs as people are led through an exercise to help weave these alien experiences into their normal fabric of their lives. Research has shown that the sooner people talk through their experiences, the sooner the trauma can be assimilated, and the likelihood of adverse long term effects like PTSD, etc. is minimized.

The facilitators will draw heavily on the nature of God and the promises of scripture, assuring the group that: calamities do not take our sovereign God by surprise; He has a good and loving purpose for all events in our lives; and our love for Christ and others is deepened as God gives us grace to navigate through difficult life experiences.

Introduction Phase

- Introduce leader and co-leader
- Set purpose and expectations of the group
 - Assure confidentiality
 - Discourage critique of the event or criticism of how it was initially handled
 - Explain that participation is both voluntary and strongly encouraged
 - Explain that all group discussion will be before God, in light of scripture, and consistent with the HBCD Doctrinal Statement
- Set the rules for group process
 - The leader will ask questions and each member responds in turn
 - No class breaks are planned as the healing process requires group dynamics and continuity
 - If a personal break is required, please minimize the time apart from the group (Co-leader should escort)
 - Please mute or turn off phones and avoid texting unless an emergency

Fact Phase

- How did you first learn of the event?
- Where were you?
- What did you see?
- What were you doing at the time? (you can stack these questions, vs. asking them all)

- Emphasis here is on accurate factual information, no rumors
- Leader should redirect the emotional content to later phases
- Leader may say: That is a fair question, or let's hold it for later. We have times coming up for just that experience.

Thought Phase

- What was your first thought at the time when you learned of the event? What jumped into your mind?
- After you had time to reflect and/or pray for those involved, how did your perception of the crisis change? Has it matured? Deteriorated?
- Leader should be careful not to assume reactions that are not there nor project his/her own onto participants
- Leader may say: Tell me more about that

Reaction Phase

- What was the worst part of this event for you?
- What different ways has this event impacted you?
- What part of this do you most wish you could change?
- What about this is hardest to handle?
- Did you experience the peace that God often grants during times like these or not? Please describe.
- Have any specific verses brought you comfort and encouragement? If so, what were they?
- If someone cries during this time, leader should pause and let them do so.
- Leader should acknowledge that this is hard

Symptom Phase

- Leader summarizes the discussion regarding the common stress symptoms identified by the group (see page 4)
- Leader summarizes the biblical hope and encouragement found by the group

Teaching Phase

- Refer to the list of stress symptoms (below) and point out those just identified
- Explain that these stress symptoms are typical, normal reactions to an abnormal situation

- Explain the natural fight/flight/freeze response when there is a perceived threat to our physical safety
 - Fight - When we believe there's a chance we can outfight our attackers
 - Flight - When we believe there's a chance we can outrun our attackers
 - Freeze – When we perceive that there is no hope of surviving
- Have the group read and discuss the following passages:
 - The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law. *Deuteronomy 29:29* (this is a good verse for the “why?” questions)
 - Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me, for in you my soul takes refuge; in the shadow of your wings I will take refuge, till the storms of destruction pass by. *Psalms 57:1*
 - Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints. *Psalms 116:15*
 - He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms; he will carry them in his bosom, and gently lead those that are with young. *Isaiah 40:11*
 - Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as we share abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we share abundantly in comfort too. *2 Cor 1:3-5*
 - For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. *Hebrews 4:15-16*
 - *This is not the time for Ro. 8:28 or other similar verses. The truths of God's good providence will be better heard at a later time.*

Re-entry Phase

- Encourage committing one of the above verses to memory
- Discuss the value of individual journaling or memorials
 - An Ebenezer stone: “Till now the Lord has helped us.” – *1 Samuel 7:12*
- Give opportunity for any final questions/comments
- Offer them follow-up soul care with trained individuals if needed.
 - Have everyone fill out a follow-up card during the debrief meeting. If they desire or need additional help you will have easy access to their contact information.

Follow up

- Facilitators should debrief after the session

Some of the common signs and symptoms of a stress reaction:

Physical Symptoms	Cognitive Symptoms	Emotional Symptoms	Behavioral Changes
Fatigue Dizziness Faintness Muscle tremors Rapid heart rate Nausea Vomiting Diarrhea Dry mouth Profuse sweating Chills Increased thirst Headaches Visual disturbances Difficulty breathing* Chest pains* Symptoms of shock*	Disorientation* Daze Confusion Impaired concentration Impaired attention span Elevated alertness Partial amnesia Impaired decision making Hyper-vigilance Easily reminded of event Thoughts of event come often to mind	Sense of numbness or unreality Extreme moodiness Anxiety Fear of similar events in the future Anger at cause of event Anger at others spared from such events Irritability Sadness Guilt Unrealistic sense of being responsible for event Grief Depression Uncontrollable waves of emotion about event Sudden tearfulness Alternating periods of numbness and intense feelings about the event	Increased sleep Decreased sleep/insomnia Nightmares Increased appetite Diminished appetite Nervousness Restlessness Easily startled Emotional outbursts Social withdrawal Avoidance of others Decreased interest in normal interests/hobbies Increased family conflicts Impaired work performance Increased use of sick time Increased need to keep busy Increased use of drugs/alcohol Compulsion to return to scene of accident

*Medical evaluation needed

Recommended Strategies to Help Speed Recovery from a Traumatic Event

- Give yourself time to recover
 - Remember a traumatic event has just shaken your world
 - Don't try to rush your recovery
 - Avoid compounding the distress by telling yourself you shouldn't be feeling this way – it will only make matters worse
- It is okay to think about the event
 - Don't fight recurring thoughts or memories
 - They are a normal part of recovery and will diminish over time
- Draw heavily on your relationship with Christ
 - Draw near to Him and He will draw near to you
 - Immerse yourself in scripture daily, especially the Psalms as they express the entire range of human emotion in the form of prayers
 - Document your prayer requests for each day and the specific answers to prayer already received
- Make use of your relationships with other believers
 - Attend small group, women's/men's ministries with regularity
 - Talk with others about the event and how it affects you
 - People that are open in talking about the event draw support from others and recover more quickly than those that avoid talking about it
 - Your willingness to talk about the event can be evidence of the faithfulness of God and be a great encouragement to others
- Physical exercise will probably help
 - Maintain whatever exercise program you are already following
 - If you do not have one, this would be a good time to start
 - Start in a modest fashion, even brisk walking will afford some relief from tension and anxiety
- Maintain good nutrition
 - Restore balance in your life with basic nutrition and rest
 - This is not the time to get by on junk food and irregular eating habits
 - Structure your days and evenings to allow for seven to eight hours of sleep per night

- Do not rely on alcohol to help you get to sleep; it could easily bring on a number of other difficulties
- Do not turn to alcohol or drugs
 - Neither alcohol nor drugs are an effective way to help manage your reaction to the event; they just will not work
 - Any apparent relief you seem to obtain chemically is far outweighed by the chances that you will prolong your distress and damage important relationships
- Know when to seek Biblical Soul Care and counseling
 - If you sense that you are having a severe or prolonged period of distress, seek Biblical Soul Care by contacting Pastor Kip Hamby
 - Biblical Soul Care can provide you with reassurance that you can recover from this trauma and equip you with useful skills for the future and for helping others
 - A high degree of stress that interferes with daily functioning--along with deep depression, prolonged sleep disorders and substance abuse—may warrant professional evaluation and counseling

The above process was designed specifically for HBCD based on material taken from The Provision of School-Based Consultation and Debriefing Services Following Traumatic Events by John J. Jochem, Psy.-D., C.A.D.C.