

TRAUMA DEBRIEFING FOR MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL EVACUEE STUDENTS

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The following are some suggestions that you may wish to follow as you prepare to debrief the students.

- Group Size:** 8-10 participants
- Group Membership:** Middle/High School evacuee students
- Session Length:** Recommend maximum two hour duration.
- Resource Materials:** Name tags, felt marker, Kleenex, hand outs and reference material.
- Location:** In house but in an area not to be utilized by others during the session.
- Room Set Up:** Debriefing can be conducted around a table or in a circle without a table. One is not more beneficial than the other.
- Seating Arrangement:** Debriefers are to sit among participants rather than together so as to minimize and "Us-Them" perception.
- Special Considerations:** Pop, water is permissible. Phone needs to be disconnected or the ringer turned off. Cell phones are to be put on vibration or turned off. It is understood that no one is to have access to the participants except for extreme emergency. Back-up personnel can assist unless the emergency is one of a personal issue for the participant.
- Administrative Responsibility:** The Principal and/or his designee must be present at the school and immediately accessible during the

debriefing process and following the process. The administrator's presence is necessary for three reasons: 1) a participant leaves during the session because it has become too difficult; 2) problems arise which need immediate resolution; 3) requests for additional support and resources are made which can be addressed by the administrator. (It is not the role of the debriefer to engage in problem solving system or personnel issues.)

Number of Debriefers: Three debriefers are recommended – one to lead each of the three stages of this model.

Something Very Important to Keep In Mind:

Debriefing is not counseling. It is not the time to respond to the students about their issues. It is a time to listen and to affirm that they were heard. A simple acknowledgement such as “all right” or “okay” is all that is needed in response to what they say during a debriefing session.

In this particular model of debriefing, the reflecting, restating, etc. is done during the summary stage.

Once all of the above has been done, you are now ready to get your group and follow the debriefing process found on the next few pages with the exception of one other thing. You may wish to cut the following pages on the dotted lines and place them on 5”x7” index cards for ease of use during the session.

Introduction

It is unfortunate that such a traumatic natural disaster has brought us together. I'm sorry you have had to experience such a difficult thing.

Team Member Introductions

My name is _____. These are my colleagues _____ and _____.

We have been asked to meet with you to give you some information about trauma and all its possible reactions which are very likely new for you, but very normal reactions following such a disaster. We are here to pass on to you what others have experienced following similar events.

We are also here to help you describe your experiences to one another. Even though some of you may not want to be here right now, we think you'll find that this will help you with what you have experienced, and help you see that you are probably sharing some similar reactions.

This is not about how well you responded. It is about looking at all the kinds of reactions you are experiencing and may yet experience in the weeks to come. There is not a right or wrong reaction. This is not about blaming; about what was

done right or wrong. It is about learning what you need to know about trauma and what will help you recover. **1.**

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This session must be confidential. This means no one is to talk to anyone about anything that is said here today. You may tell others of your reactions but not what others talk about today. Do we all agree?

We will start by asking you about what happened. Each of you will have an opportunity to respond as we go around the group. You may pass on a question but we will come back to you later. We will go in the same order for each question. After spending time on factual information and details, we will look at personal reactions. The last stage is the summary stage where we will give you some information, ways to help yourself. We will also give you the opportunity to talk a little about what you have heard; make some recommendations as to what might be helpful for you in your school and to ask us questions.

Listening to what one another has to say will be very helpful to healing and feeling better. We must ask that you not interrupt while one of the other participants is talking. Initially you will have many personal reactions that will cause you to want to say things in response to what you hear. What you feel is important and we will talk about personal reactions later in the meeting, but until we get to that part we'll be talking more about factual information. **2.**

- You may notice that we have index cards. As you begin to tell your stories you will be making us, in a way, witnesses. It is sometimes difficult for us to listen to the details of such tragic situations. It is not easy for any one. These cards list the questions we want to ask you so we can make sure we cover all the critical issues and give you the best help possible.
- Also, _____ will be taking some notes to help when we get to the point where we give a review and a summary of all we have learned. There will be a lot and we want to be sure to capture as much as we can. No records will be kept, but if taking notes is a problem, just let us know and we'll put the note pad away.
- Just one last issue. If you have cell phones, could you please put them on silent while we go through this process?

3.

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The questioning begins now.

Let us begin with the factual information and details.

1. First, can you please tell us who you are and where in Louisiana, Mississippi, or Alabama that you lived?
Allow each one to answer in order, and then continue.
2. Where were you when this happened or when you first found out and what did you do?
3. What stands out most in your mind as to what you might have seen or heard during the hurricane or evacuation?
4. Are there details about the hurricane/evacuation that you have heard since it happened different than what others here have told us?
5. Was there anything that others have said that was supposed to happen but you know did not happen?

4.

Okay, let me shift the focus.

6. What was the first thought you can recall having when the hurricane hit or you were evacuated?
7. As you think about it now, what one thought stands out the most in your mind?
8. Of all the thoughts you had, the things you did, or the reactions you experienced, which one thought or reaction are you most surprised you even had? (In other words, what surprised you the most about you?)
9. Was there anything you thought you wished you would have done or said differently?
10. Is there anything you did that left you second guessing yourself or not quite sure you handled as effectively as you could have with some preparation?
11. If something similar were to happen again, how do you think you might react differently?

Thank you. At this point, I'm going to let _____ continue.

5.

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Personal Reaction Stage

We are going to look at personal reactions now. Let me ask:

1. What was the worst moment for you?
2. Where did you feel the hurt or the fear the most in your body?
3. What scared you the most then?
4. What scares you the most now?
5. What reactions are you having that you might be afraid to let others know about because you think these reactions are not normal?

6.

6. What other reactions are you having that are new to you, persistent, seem strange, or are worrisome to you? Are there any traumatic dreams, flashbacks, intrusive thoughts, etc.?
7. What worries you now that did not worry you before?
8. Is there anything you think might have been done that wasn't done or was done that didn't need to be done?
9. How has the hurricane/evacuation changed your view of your life right now?

7.

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Summary Stage

Well, we are now at the final stage. I am going to turn it over to

Let me first summarize the main issues that came up today. (The debriefer doing the summary may refer to his/her notes.)

1. Normalize the reactions they identified during the session...”The reactions you described are not at all unusual...feeling responsible, having dreams, being easily startled, wanting it to be over, etc.”
2. Prepare them for ongoing reactions by using the handout, “**Helpful Strategies for Trauma Victims/Survivors**”—pp. 109-110 in TLC’s **Trauma Debriefing for Schools and Agencies**. “Do not be surprised if weeks, even months, from now you experience some of the feelings or reactions that you have described today. They will come again but, hopefully, will get just a little bit easier each time.

8.

4. Discuss the fact that current reactions may continue or new reactions may yet emerge. This is normal during the first four weeks or so. Encourage them to call for assistance, however, if the reactions go beyond 4-8 weeks or are causing them to perform or function poorly. (**Important exception:** Reactions may extend beyond the four to eight week acute stress period when a person is involved in disasters or other external events where physical reminders cannot be avoided. The same may occur when the details of an incident are kept alive in the media for an extended period of time. Such events often necessitate follow-up debriefing sessions.)
5. Ask, “Do you have any final questions?” Also ask, “What at this point in time might help you get through the next several days?”

9.

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6. **(Closure)** Thank you very much...I know how difficult it can be to revisit such a traumatic incident, but I think you'll find this will be helpful to you. Please let you high school counselor know if you are having problems and they will see that you get to visit with someone.
- (Mingle for a few minutes after to answer personal questions and/or discreetly recommend to a participant that additional assistance might be helpful.)
 - (Remember: Do not get into your car and drive away immediately. Wait at least 15 minutes before leaving. Talk with the other debriefers, take a short walk, and take some deep breaths before starting back home.
 - **Within the next few days after debriefing, find a confidential place where the high school students may draw on a mural to express their experience with this disaster.**

<http://www.tlcinstitute.org>

This information is made available courtesy of The National Institute for Trauma and Loss in Children (TLC), a non-profit 501(c)3 program of Children's Home of Detroit (CHD). If you have questions that you would like to ask our TLC Certified Trauma Specialist on staff, or would like a recommendation for a TLC Certified Trauma Specialist in your area, please call TLC toll-free at 877-306-5256 or email us at steele@tlcinst.org