

PSYCHOLOGICAL DEBRIEFING

Debriefing has been used over fifteen years now by disaster workers as part of emergency interventions to help people who have recently experienced major loss or suffering through natural disasters and conflicts, which involve fear, injury, extreme discomfort, property damage, or loss of friends and loved ones. It is also part of what is now called Psychological First Aid.

The goal of the debriefing is to reduce the likelihood of Post traumatic stress disorder ([PTSD](#)), or other psychological problems in the longer term.

Experience in the matter of psychological support to victims accumulated in the course of the 20th century has shown that emotional reactions to a traumatising event are normal and not the sign of a weak character; consequently, victims should not be considered as "psychiatric" cases, even if they have strong emotional reactions.

Consequently:

- Support should be provided as soon as possible after the traumatising event
- Survivors and those near them must talk about their experience
- Information on the situation and possible future traumatic reactions should be maximised, so that the victim can appreciate the facts properly and make sense of what has happened

Psychological Debriefing is a psychological support tool which aims at reducing reactions to a potentially traumatising event. It is not a therapy for the treatment of [Critical Incident Stress](#) and is based on the principle that most victims have the ability to react adequately to insure their survival.

Thus:

- The intervention must take place as soon as possible after the incident
- The victim should be able to talk freely about what has happened
- Feel free to relive emotions, cry, express anger, tremble, without the feeling of being judged.

In other words, debriefing is one of the many ways which can be used to support reliefworkers after critical incidents. A shorter version is called "Defusing" and can be easily learned by field managers in charge of teams. It may be used by non-professionals as long as they have received *adequate training* in use of the technique.