

Debrief After Crisis: Questions to Ask



Debriefing after a crisis event is a critical step that allows the crisis team to determine what went well, what didn't, and what could be improved. Debriefing conversations should occur in such a way that team members are able to provide thoughtful insight. The purpose of a debrief is not to place blame, but to determine how the team responded to the event so you can be better prepared in the future.

What happened?

A simple statement of facts that includes who, what, when, and where helps frame the event and debrief conversations. This can be prepared before meetings or discussions and shared during the debriefing conversation.

What was the root cause of the event?

Understanding the reasons an incident happened informs prevention opportunities.

What was the impact on our organization as a result of this event?

Impact on the organization can take a variety of forms and may not be easily ascertained. A decline in enrollment would take time to materialize, but stakeholder trust, campus safety, and risk of litigation are a few examples of impact that may be more quickly realized.

Is it possible to ensure that this type of event doesn't happen again? (e.g. data breach)

Not every event can be prevented, or even anticipated, but are there preventative measures that can be put in place in a cost-effective way?

Was the Crisis Plan usable? Do any updates need to be made to the Crisis Plan?

A Crisis Plan is only helpful if it's usable. Were there missing resources or tools that need to be obtained?

How did the team work together during the event? Were the right people involved in decision-making?

Are there additional training opportunities for team members and does the crisis team need to be expanded or tightened?

Did stakeholders receive the information they needed? Was it distributed through the correct channel?

Was information received in a timely way?

Students, parents, teachers, alumni, and community members all have different levels of need in a crisis. Were your messages customized to empower each stakeholder group with the information it needed?

Has the organization taken steps to begin relationship repair with affected audiences?

Crisis communication doesn't end just because the immediate impact has lessened. Post-event communication is critical to maintaining brand reputation. What steps need to be taken to repair relationships with stakeholders?

What lessons did you learn about your team or our organizational response from the event?

No one person or team saw every aspect of the crisis. Allowing others to share the insights they gleaned provides a more thorough picture of the event and your organization's response.

Do your faculty, staff, or students need additional or ongoing support as a result of this event?

Support can include operational support, physical support, or emotional support.