Facilitation of Debriefings
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I. Things to think about before the debriefing
   A. Group culture and norms (profession, ethnicity, gender, etc.) – use of
      language, comfort with affective expression, etc.
   B. How homogenous or heterogeneous – Is this a group that will be working
      together after the debriefing?
   C. Nature of critical incident or disaster and its valence for the group – context,
      history, meaning
   D. Political, social, cultural factors that may affect what is shared and how things
      are shared.

II. Forming relationships with group members
   A. Debriefings rely on the centrality of relationships
   B. Dyregrov stresses importance of the opening phases to establish trust, set
      boundaries, articulate norms, foster the motivation to continue, relieve
      anxiety, encourage group cohesiveness, prepare people for what is to come.
   C. Wide vision and balance - Being able to track and work with the entire group.
   D. Careful listening and conveying genuine empathy
   E. Non-verbal cues – Conveying empathy non-verbally. Importance of sustained
      and shared eye contact, attentive posture, empathic use of voice.
   F. Mirroring and validation as well as normalizing what people say.
   G. Respecting where group members are and trusting the group process

III. Facilitation
   A. Dyregrov stresses that a good facilitator: establishes trust, outlines goals,
      motivates the group, builds relationships, is a good role model, clarifies
      important issues, helps to build cohesion and support, guards against
      destructive group processes, assesses strengths and vulnerabilities of
      members, stimulates and fine-tunes a positive group process.
   B. Importance of being relevant and real – avoid clichés or stock phrases.
   C. Affirming everyone – Creating space for everyone to have their own unique
      reactions.
   D. Timing and pace – Knowing when to talk and when to listen; staying with a
      theme or phase or moving on; keeping track of the time; ensuring that debriefing
      does not end with people being left emotionally wide open.
   E. Balancing the needs of individuals and the group.
   F. Balance between being structured and directive and being flexible and
      responsive to the group process.
   G. Co-facilitation – conveying a respectful, cooperative relationship.
   H. Staying in role of facilitator
      1. Balance between facilitating and presenting
      2. Fostering interaction between members
3. Not using this as an opportunity to debrief yourself

I. Explaining and clarifying without explaining too much
J. Summarizing and highlighting

IV. Using and Knowing oneself in the group
A. Tracking and managing your own affect
B. Awareness of triggers and blind spots that need to be navigated.
C. Managing difficult emotions.

V. Special Circumstances
A. Handling extreme anger and emotional reactions: allow if directed outside of group, assume control and set limits if it is directed inside of the group, reflect (e.g. is anger due to sense of helplessness?), don’t let old issues get played out in the group, reframe anger as caring
B. Handling conflict: Set limits, reframe as caring, do not let it derail the process. See if there are ways that it can be followed up after the debriefing.
C. When people monopolize or take up too much space: Prevention, watch for cues, don’t postpone intervention, intervene in a polite and supportive way, consistent limit setting, use non-verbal signals, ask what others think about a given question.

Note: Much of this was inspired by Dyregrov (1997; 2003) and reworked based on my own experiences of facilitating debriefings.


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