

Focused Conversation Debriefing a Major Trauma¹

Opening:

This event has shaken all of us. Let's take a little time to reflect on what's happened, so we can come to terms with it. I'm going to ask some questions that will help us gradually process what happened. I would like you to let everyone have their own answers—no interrupting, arguing, or judging what anyone says.

Objective Questions

Imagine you were a video camera recording what you saw happening. What actions, words, phrases, objects, and scenes are recorded?

Let's get everything out so we all have a full picture of what happened.

Reflective Questions

What shocked you about this event?

What was most frightening?

What made you want to escape?

How else did you find yourself reacting?

Any place you wanted to cheer?

Interpretive Questions

Why do you think this happened?

What might have been some other contributing factors?

What impact does it have on you?

How are you different now?

How might we be different a year from now?

What can we learn from this?

Decisional Questions

What can we do to prevent this from happening again?

Who else do you need to see or talk with?

What can we do to help each other now?

What can we do to symbolize how we changed or what we have learned?

Closing

We will undoubtedly continue to reflect on this. If you need help, please be sure to ask for it.

¹ From Debriefing a Major Trauma with Students or Staff in *The Art of Focused Conversations for Schools: Over 100 Ways to Guide Clear Thinking and Promote Learning*, ed. Jo Nelson, New Society Press and The Canadian Institute of Cultural Affairs, 2001, p. 155. While focused on debriefing an event in a school setting, questions can be adapted for any traumatic event. It was used successfully a number of times after the 9/11 incident in the USA.