

# IMPACT DEBRIEFING

Support for individuals and  
teams responding to overdoses

ABRPO & the Good Grief Care Pilot

Essential Tool



## AIDS Bereavement and Resiliency Program of Ontario

*Presence. Compassion. Change.*

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# Impact Debriefing: Essential Tool

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**Prepared for:** The AIDS Bereavement and Resiliency Program of Ontario  
(ABRPO) [www.abrpo.org](http://www.abrpo.org)

### Material adapted from:



- ❖ *Essential Tools for Support and Stability – Worker Resource Kit* AIDS Bereavement and Resiliency Program of Ontario [www.abrpo.org](http://www.abrpo.org)
- ❖ *Debriefing Guide* <https://vikkireynolds.ca/>
- ❖ *Reducing Harms: Recognizing and Responding to Opioid Overdoses in your organization:* Canadian Mental Health Association  
<https://cmha-ontario-reducing-harms-nov-20-2017.pdf>
- ❖ *Many Indigenous communities have long used Healing Circles as a way of providing support and promoting community wellness. The circle itself is a key symbol in Indigenous spirituality and gatherings, representing our interdependence, connection and equality. Circles are based on the mind, body, and spirit connection; ensuring that these things are in balance and offering a space for collective and self-examination of these aspects.*

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# Impact Debriefing: Essential Tool

**Debriefing is a process when a person is supported to reflect on what has happened for them in a particular situation. It is a container where a person can experience their own feelings and reactions, without judgement, in order to make sense of their responses to a crisis or a challenging/disturbing event.**

**The goal of impact debriefing** is to provide support and stability to individuals involved in a critical or traumatic incident, such as an overdose, either as a direct responder, a witness, or as the person being revived.

**Impact Debriefing** processes are part of an integrated overall agency strategy. As part of a Harm Reduction approach, Impact Debriefing can be added to the skill-sets accompanying Naloxone training and clear opioid overdose protocols so workers feel confident in responding to critical incidents. The agency will also have formal *Incident Debriefing* protocols to help assess what can be improved from an organizational perspective.

## Commit to Each Other's Wellbeing and Resilience

Debriefing should take place immediately following an overdose incident. Make a commitment to check in with each other in a structured, meaningful way. People respond to critical situations differently. Some people can appear fine in the crisis, but will react later on. Others have intense responses at the time which quickly dissipate. Know your team mates. Learn each other's reactions and support needs.

### When do you need to debrief?

- Feeling shaky or anxious
- Feeling numb, disconnected
- Repeating aspects of the situation in your mind
- Feeling ungrounded or reactive

### When does the other person need debriefing?

- Telling big stories, seems emotionally charged
- Not paying attention or seeming distracted
- Seem not themselves; high tone of voice, agitated



## Connection is Key

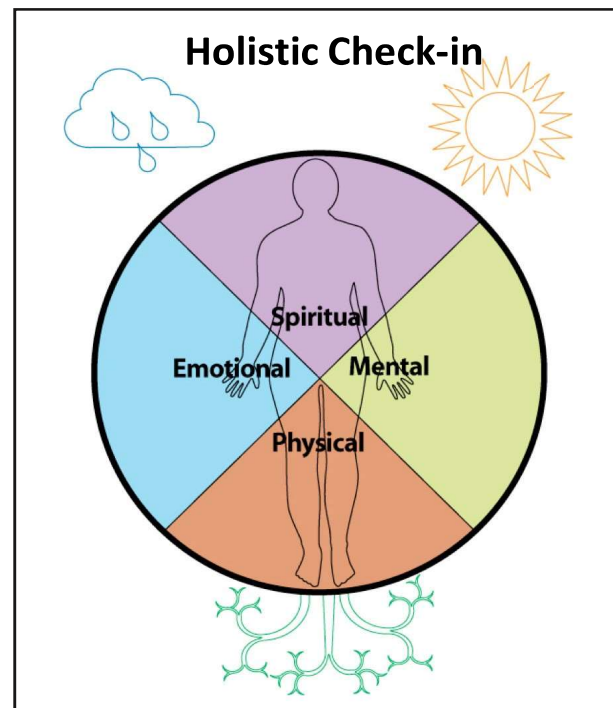
### Structure for Impact Debriefing

- a) Find a quiet setting for a committed amount of time for debriefing. Start with **getting grounded** – spend a few minutes making contact in a way that helps the person know you are present and willing to spend time focusing on their well being. Take a few deep breaths with long exhales and have your feet on the floor.
- b) Our aim is to connect in support and solidarity and not to go over all the details. Support someone to use “*I statements*” to describe their own direct experience rather than getting lost in recounting details of a situation. “*This incident happened. Before we move into reviewing the event itself, we have a commitment to care for each other, and I’d like to check in about what the impact was on you?*”

How are you doing in relation to the event?

- Physically
- Emotionally
- Mentally
- Spiritually/Sense of Connection

Use **reflective listening** “*I hear a lot of frustration in your voice*” to make sure that the person feels validated and that you are understanding them clearly. Notice where they are able to connect with themselves and reflect this back to them. “*I notice that your breathing has slowed down and you seem less anxious now*”. Affirm that they have done well in a challenging situation. The intention is to provide space for their range of experiences without deepening or problem solving at this stage. Their ability to connect with themselves and with others is key at this time.



- c) **Ask:** How do you take care of yourself in this type of situation? Is there any other support you might need right now? Any next steps? Further informal or formal debriefing support?

Offer choices if your partner is struggling with **containment or reconnection**. When people are overwhelmed it's not easy for them to say what they need- but having choices offered is useful: physical contact/touch, a glass of water, phone call to a friend, fresh air, clearing such as smudging... think of useful immediate things that you can provide. When someone seems well connected to themselves, support them in their next steps: “*Would staying here at work but not on the front lines be helpful?*” “*Would you like to leave this space? How will you get home or to a friend’s place?*”

## Sharing Knowledge Improves our Practice

### Reflect on what happened and what you learned (best with the team)

- a) **What did we do right?** Our responses to the crisis are being developed by our peers, in the moment. We want to share the learning of what we did that worked.
- b) **What do we need to do differently?** While we want to be cautious not to share too many details, we need to share the things that everyone should know. Each time we respond, we learn something new and it's helpful to acknowledge that we may need to do things differently.

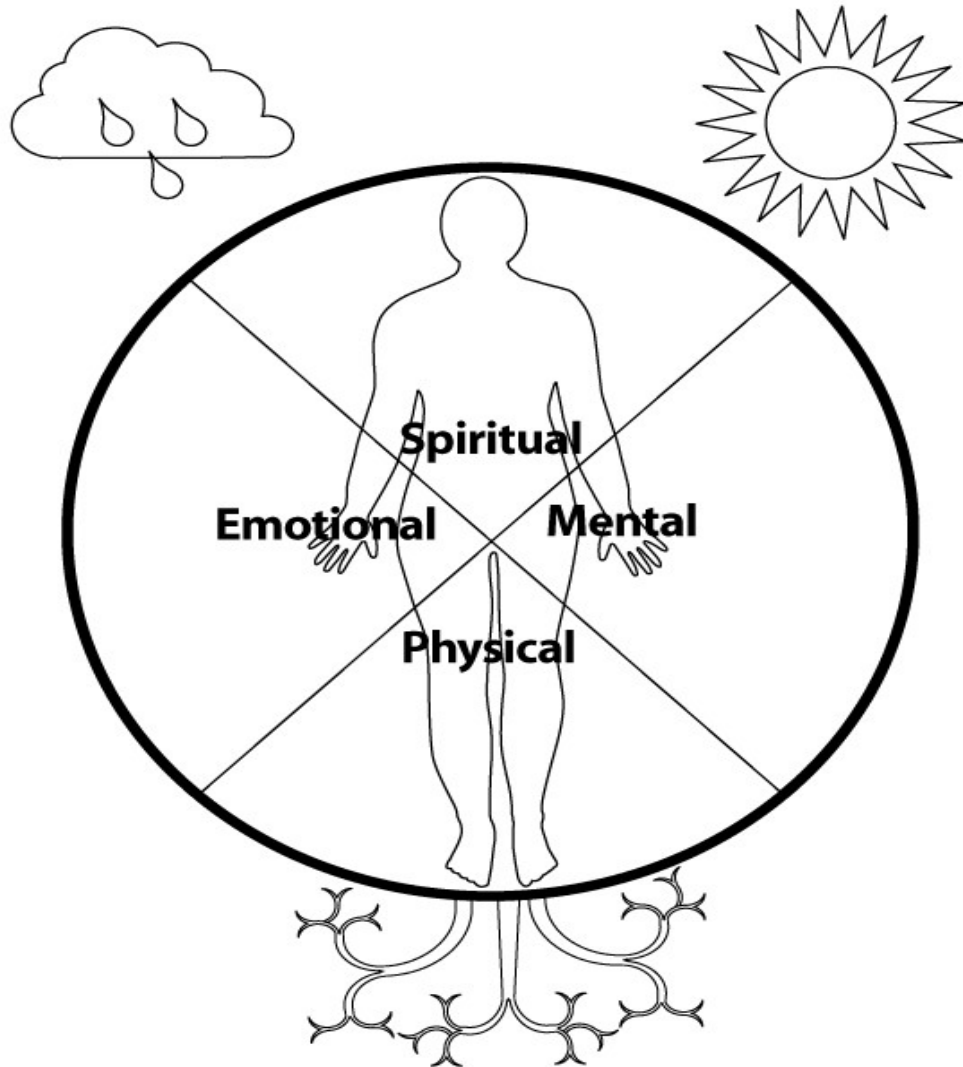
## When There's a Death

Agencies may have policies and procedures that inform what happens after a death- but for many of us, this is a new time and new procedures may be required. To help create a more inclusive, grief aware agency response, here are some questions to consider within your teams:

- 1. Following a Death:** Who should be informed? How do you want to be informed? When should you be informed? What should be included as part of this communication? Is there some way the agency acknowledges a death? (candle/name near the front desk? memorial book?)
- 2. Absence Arrangements:** What kind of supports are in place for bereavement leaves? Memorial attendance? Follow up visits with family/friends? Grief/stress leave? Time for renewal?
- 3. Debriefing Supports:** What arrangements are there for 1-1 lateral/peer debriefings? What type of team supports are in place? Team debriefings? Specialized external supports? What is available for peers and community members?
- 4. Memorials:** How does the agency remember people?
- 5. Traumatic deaths are not something we can easily accommodate to.** It's okay that we refuse to normalize these deaths. And yet, we also need to be prepared to show up well and handle crises every day. This refined skill comes with experience, discipline, and a deep commitment to our activist work. *How do we live with a "just anger" or "heartbreaking sorrow"?*
- 6. Holding On and Letting Go** *(thanks to Vikki Reynolds)*
  - Who was this person? Tell the story of that unique individual
  - What difference did I make in this person's life? (important for our own sustainability)
  - What difference did that person make in my life? (their legacy and helps us remain humble)
  - How are you going to resist the disappearance of this person?



*This Holistic Health model reflects an Indigenous world view. We are deeply grateful that these teachings have been shared with us ~ the AIDS Bereavement and Resiliency Program of Ontario*



## Holistic Check-In

**How are you doing? Really?**

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