

Crisis situation in a student community: After-care

Anu Morikawa, Aalto chaplain

Laura Mäntylä, Helsinki University chaplain

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Critical event

- Any situation which causes a strong feeling of vulnerability and losing control
- If the danger is real, it sparks the same feelings as when something had actually happened
- The event is above regular experiences, "above normal existing"
- Threatens our view to cope with the situation and our feeling of basic safety
- Overloads psychological mechanisms
- Sudden, life-threatening

Experience-based discussion on unburdening = defusing



- Experience-based, meaning more than just theoretical thinking
- Defusing is part bomb-dismantling: You need to take something apart and make it harmless
- Defusing is an immediate discussion session for participants of an event who leaving for home (0-24 hours after it occurred)
- Going through surface thoughts and feelings when sight, hearing, smell and other sensory memory is still fresh
- If someone feels they don't need defusing, it's still good to call them after a week
- A Defusing session is short, usually at most 45 minutes

Why defuse?

- Calms exceptional and atypical feelings, so you can e.g. drive home safely
- Similar info on what has happened and the opportunity for more help to everyone
- Practical advice on controlling stress
- Feelings need a target: If you cannot defuse them in the correct situation, it might lead to them bubbling over in various situations
- Normalizing feelings: Explain that the feelings experienced are normal, so that no one feels scared on what they have felt
- Awake the belief in that recovery from the event is possible
- In difficult cases: Getting past the first twenty-four hours, facing tomorrow

Psychological aftermath = debriefing



- Follows defusing
- Debriefing 24-72h after the event
- A "How do you feel now?" tracking session 3 weeks, a half-year or a year after the event
- A longer session which may last 2-3 hours
- The aim is to work on mental reactions, face reality, normalize reactions, ease anxiety after the event and prevent later stress reactions
- Many times a debriefing is not needed, if defusing has been done
- Can be used in long-term situations, in for example if an exchange student is worried over the situation of their loved ones and/or country

Ideal way to act in a crisis situation

- Immediate defusing for involved people; before they leave for home!
- Do not send anyone home shocked; if no one is home to meet them, at least call them to check up
- The next day, a session for people who weren't present but who were intensely touched by the event
- If needed, a press conference to avoid rumours: What has happened and how do we continue from here
- A ritual (memorial moment?) before or after the debriefing
- A debriefing for people who participated in the defusing -> possible long-term aid (FSHS?)

Communicating

- When giving a press conference on the session, it is important to explain what it is about, rather than just talking about "a debriefing"
- A press conference can be offered and used for evaluating the need for after-care
- In cases with deaths, the family/relations are always informed by police or the authorities
- When a newsletter is sent via email, it is good to attach a contact where you can call for more info
- Information at the beginning is important also because people can be so traumatized that they might not remember anything at first

Generally humane, but with gender differences

- The brains of the human species work in a same way regardless of culture or background; our emotions are same in all people (on a deep level)
-> meaning recovery is similar
- Genders react in the same way, but expression is different
- Feminine way: talk, cry, tell someone about it, pamper yourself, feel guilt, feel that you cannot affect what happened, mourn for a long time
- Masculine: Talk to close individuals in the first 24 hours and then close up; defusing via action like sports, alcohol and sex
- On average men grieve faster than women
- Men find more guilt outside them, women inside them

Critique

- "It didn't affect John Wayne, it shouldn't affect me"
- A common opposition to after-care in the scientific community: Thinking you can rationalize crisis situations away with cold logic
- Some people think that defusing increases anxiety, but all people who have done acute crisis work are impressed with the effects
- Anxiety can grow if the support is insufficient or the people in charge of recovery are unprofessional
- 81% of survey responses of Finns regarding the psychological after-care of the tsunami event felt it helped
- Acting fast is important!

Anxious?

- Thinking of unpleasant things is not nice, but in thinking of solutions beforehand you may create a sense of calm even with difficult issues
- For example, a divorce increased stress levels more than death
- From an outside point-of-view it is impossible to determine how a person feels in a situation
- When talking of crisis work, you often talk about accidents and immediate care. Crisis work is other things too
- Crisis work can touch someone in a situation where no one is in a life-threatening situation (for example a close encounter situation)

Why after-care

- Your situation as organizational actives
- Student culture
- Responsibility
- The responsibilities of the student union and the university
- Community well-being, strength reserves, coping mechanisms

How to recognize a crisis in a student community?



- A culture of speaking (openness, acceptance, respect, equality)
- Behavior -> anomaly?
- Means of action -> changes?
- The concept of a safe space
- Threats
- Something sudden, surprising, scary, irregular
- Someone drops out, withdraws, is absent

What do I do in a crisis situation?

- Calmness
- Accept reactions in yourself and others. It is impossible to know beforehand on how you will react in a crisis
- Talking, listening, being present
- Ask
- Don't leave anyone alone, but don't force them to do anything
- Ask for help. Remember the chaplains!
- Communications

Readiness

- Ensure people's safety
- Taking care of communications -> what are the “marching orders” and good practices?
- Community well-being -> returning to routines, doing things together, having a culture of openness
- Directing people to help and support
- Asking help to ensure what is best for the whole community!

In practice

- How can this be done in practice: In your organization, guild or hobby group?
- What measures are required?
- Cooperating inside the organization, also with external cooperation partners
- Individual vs. community



Anu Morikawa

050 464 4375

anu.morikawa@evl.fi

Laura Mäntylä

050 591 9874

laura.mantyla@evl.fi

Ihmistä varten – För mänskan