

Collaborative Review

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May I Have a Moment of Your Time?

Regular Debriefing Improves the Collaborative Team's Effectiveness

Linda Solomon, LPC, LCDC, LMFT and Carl Michael Rossi, MA, JD, LPC

“Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!”

– Queen of Hearts

Have you ever felt that way, even in your Collaborative Practice? Maybe in all that running, you are missing a step.

Each Collaborative case will take a certain amount of time and a certain number of meetings. There is nothing more frustrating – for the clients and for the professionals – than a meeting that falls into dispute and disarray. Meeting dysfunction is very costly, not only in money for the clients, but also in confidence lost in the professionals and the Collaborative process itself.

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of the Collaborative process
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An essential element to minimizing the frustration that comes with some joint meetings is for the Collaborative professionals to implement tools to encourage accountability and cohesiveness among team members. It is vital to the success of the Collaborative process that each team member maintain a commitment to consistent, scheduled, productive debriefs. If we recognize and advise that moving through the steps in the process is so important for the clients, why do many professionals/teams not take the time to engage in debriefs?

Many people will say, “I don’t avoid debriefing; I just don’t have time. I have scheduled the allotted time for the session and I need to spend time with my client after the meeting, or go back to my office to focus on other matters.” Or, they might say, “We didn’t have a team debrief on the calendar and it is too difficult to schedule one between meetings.”

What prevents Collaborative professionals from placing a higher priority on this part of the process? Some of the answers are: “I am never quite sure what we are supposed to be doing in the debrief.” “If there are substantive issues to be discussed, I will

call or email the other team members between meetings.” “I am not comfortable billing the client for team calls or meetings.” “I know I will see the other team members at a luncheon ...committee meetings ...various events ... later this week and we can talk then.”

To justify the necessary time commitment, Collaborative professionals must be clear about the value of time spent debriefing joint meetings. Effective debriefs generally involve discussions related to:

Case Logistics

Have a conversation about the process and the procedure generally. Who will draft documents; who will create reports; where will meetings be held.

Case-Specific Topics

Before, after and between meetings, the Collaborative team will be talking about the atmosphere they are creating for the clients to do their work. This includes pointing out clients’ hot buttons and brainstorming ways to present, rephrase and reframe various discussion points to facilitate the clients’ communication. Part of this certainly includes focusing on the clients’ goals and interests as opposed to their demands and reactions.

Interpersonal Team Dynamics

This element of a debrief can be the most challenging and uncomfortable one. It also offers the greatest opportunity for professional growth. These are the issues that are about the professional team as individuals and as a working unit. How have

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we interacted? What challenges did we experience in working together? How can we understand our own role in any rough spots so that we can be more effective on this and on other cases – even with other professionals? Address these issues immediately after every meeting with the clients for optimum effectiveness. Many teams have also found great benefit in recapping these issues shortly before meeting with the clients.

Constructive feedback gives team members the opportunity to improve the skills required for working on a team. Keep in mind it is highly probable that many team members are or have been solo practitioners. The kind of powerful self-reliance that such a practice demands is one of the sources of the challenge. Team work requires a shift from what will “I” do to what will “We” do to help this family.

In the jurisdictions where debriefs are standard practice the value of taking time to discuss the case with the team after joint meetings is never questioned.

In the jurisdictions where debriefs are standard practice the value of taking time to discuss the case with the team after joint meetings is never questioned. Team debriefs provide the opportunity for self-reflection and professional growth. Consider some of the following questions:

- Where else do you have an opportunity in your professional life to give and receive constructive feedback or criticism about your interactions with clients and other professionals?
- When, if at all, do you take the time to take an honest look at yourself and how your words and behaviors may impact the Collaborative process?
- If you are a solo practitioner, when is the last time you had an opportunity to work as a team member and notice how you are impacting a team?
- When, outside of Collaborative Practice, do you have the opportunity to examine how you react to and interrelate with the two other disciplines – to see how your assumptions about how the other disciplines “should” participate in the process impacts the process?

Consider creating a process for team members to use during a debrief (similar to an agenda for meetings with the clients) to keep everyone focused on a goal: growth as professionals and as a team. Just as when we are working with our clients, making the debrief process as clear and predictable as possible will help. Here are a few suggestions to encourage clarity and practicability in debriefing meetings.

1. Normalize the debrief.

Advise clients from the start that debriefs are a part of the process after and/or before each session. Agree expressly among the team members to commit to the debriefing meetings.

2. Create habits to make it happen.

Each scheduled session should include expressly a 15-minute block for the debrief immediately following the session. Honor that commitment.

3. Schedule with conviction.

Have your calendar at every session. The least frustrating time to create a schedule is when there is a “captive audience” with calendars in hand.

4. Meet with integrity.

Start and finish on time. Keep your attention on the issues that need to be addressed. It can be helpful if one person agrees to begin the meeting, to keep it on track and to wrap it up.

The team debrief is one of the primary places of growth as a team member and professional in the Collaborative process.

The behavior of the individual team members, as well as their interaction as team members, can and will impact the potential for clients to restructure their families in a more positive manner. The team debrief is one of the primary places of growth as a team member and professional in the Collaborative process. The debrief is a vital part of the services you are providing to your clients and it will help you be the best that YOU can be ... a strong “I” as part of a strong team.



Linda Solomon, LPC, LCDC, LMFT (www.collabneutral.com) and carlMichael rossi, MA, JD, LPC (www.CPChicago.net) maintain Collaborative practices in Dallas and Chicago, respectively. Each offers training and mentoring services to other Collaborative professionals. Together they offer a training – There is an “I” in Team – to create solid team growth and cooperation. Contact carlMichael at cmr@cpchicago.net; contact Linda at linsolomon@sbcglobal.net.