

# Effective Debriefing Tools and Techniques

Presented & Published by Training Wheels

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## Debriefing

Debriefing is a term used in experiential education to describe a question and answer session with participants. These talking sessions are generally thought to be a 'sit down' circle where the facilitator asks questions and the participants answer. Although this can be an effective debriefing technique, if it is the only technique used, participants can become bored with it and can become easily distracted.

Debriefing an experience helps participants connect lessons and activities they learned in your program to the outside world. It is a very important piece of programming and learning as a whole. If participants are not allowed to reflect on their experiences and relate them to the outside world, then a lot of the learning may be lost. So including debriefing is really valuable after powerful experiences in your program. And mixing up your debriefing activities will keep participants engaged in what they are learning and allow you to create more teachable moments.

Please refer to *A Teachable Moment*, Cain, Cummings and Stanchfield, for more theory on Processing and Debriefing.

## The Value of Reflection:

*an excerpt from A Teachable Moment, by Cain, Cummings and Stanchfield.*

An important concept to consider when implementing experiential education activities is providing opportunities to process, or reflect on their educational experiences. The educational philosopher John Dewey (1933) who is known as one of the forefathers of experiential education believed that in order to truly learn from experience there must be time for reflection.

There is no one set way to debrief or one perfect time to debrief. Using a variety of techniques and using activities that give participants the power to take the lead in the debriefing is the most engaging and effective way of viewing debriefing.

## Effective Debriefing Tools & Techniques

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1. Sit & Get
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4. Frontloading 
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8. Artistic Methods
9. Action & Reflection
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## Technique #1 Sit and Get

As mentioned above, debriefing is a term used in experiential education to describe a question and answer session with participants. These talking sessions are generally thought to be a 'sit down' circle where the facilitator asks questions and the participants answer. This is often referred to as a Sit and Get circle. This technique can be very effective as long as it is not the only technique used. If not other technique is used, participants can become bored with the process and can become easily distracted. Also in this method, the facilitator is directing the participants rather than students interpreting the experience for themselves.



## Technique #2: Pair and Share

With this technique, the facilitator first asks participants to find a partner. Once everyone has a partner the facilitator instructs the group to discuss a debriefing question together.

The debriefing technique of Pair and Share works well because the participants get a chance to practice their answer before sharing with the large group. Many participants do not like being put on the spot when asked question in front of their peers. Pair and Share also allows for each participant to answer the question, not just one person talking while the rest of the group listens. Everyone gets a chance to answer each question that is asked.

### Icebreaker Wheelies

Are you tired of asking the same questions to open your programs? Here is a unique collection of questions that will breathe new life into your openers. Our favorite way to use these cards is to let the participants ask each other the questions as an icebreaker exchange. Hand one card to each participant. Ask them to find a partner and share their response to the question on their card. After the two have each shared their response, have them exchange cards and find a new partner. Encourage 6-7 partner exchanges.



Here are a few examples:

1. What is your favorite restaurant to eat at?
2. Who was your all-time favorite teacher and why?
3. What is a current television show that you enjoy watching?
4. If you could possess one unique super power, what would it be?
5. What is your favorite old-time movie and why?

### Debriefing Wheelies

The Debriefing Wheelies were designed to help facilitators ask debriefing questions in a proper sequence that makes sense to participants. It can also shift some of the responsibility for successful processing from the facilitator to the participants. The sequence of **1) What happened**, **2) Why is this important**, and **3) How can I use this information**, not only takes participants through a progression for processing a specific event, but also presents a fun and unique way for participants to debrief themselves.



**Debriefing exchange:** Place the cards in 3 piles according to color. Instruct participants to choose one card from the **Orange Pile** first. Ask them to find a partner and share their response to the question on

their card with their partner. After the two have each shared their response, have them exchange cards and find a new partner. Encourage 3-4 partner exchanges. After 3-4 exchanges with Orange cards, have them trade out their card for a **Green card**. Encourage 3-4 partner exchanges with the green cards, then trade out this card for a **Blue card**. After 3-4 partner exchanges with the blue card the participants can return the card to the pile and form a circle. This process lets the group walk themselves through the debriefing sequence.

## Technique #3: Metaphoric Methods

**Metaphoric Methods** are amazing techniques that really let the props do the talking for you. They also give more ownership of the debriefing process to the participants themselves. Debriefing activities can be just as dynamic and engaging as challenge course initiatives or group initiatives- especially with a new frame of mind from facilitators towards recognizing that reflection is not that 'boring thing' that comes at the end of the activity. It is not. It is that thing that creates the value and wonder in learning; it is the way ideas come together as a lasting lesson.

Using objects, as symbolic representations of an experience, or personal attribute can be a very effective approach to processing. These activities engage participants in creating or choosing symbols representing a group success or individual strength or accomplishment. The strength of these types of activities is that they are not threatening to participants and facilitators, and leave the opportunities for creative and meaningful interpretation of an experience wide open.

### Metaphor Cards/Chiji Cards

Metaphor Cards are reflective tools that use metaphors or symbols to represent participant's reactions to an experience. These cards are useful as introductory activities, for processing a specific experience, for closure, or even as tools to help participants resolve conflict.



This engaging tool uses pictorial images, metaphors or symbols to represent a participant's or group's reactions to an experience. Providing a tangible image upon which participants can attach their thoughts helps give these ideas substance and shape in quite profound depth. Metaphor Cards are useful as introductory activities, for processing a specific experience, for closure, or even as a tool to help participants resolve conflict. Metaphor Card Activities are appealing to participants, can be used in many different ways, and are appropriate for all age groups.

#### Directions for Metaphor Cards/Chiji Cards:

- As an introductory activity participants can choose the card that best represents a strength they bring to the group, or a goal they have for the day, course or program.
- As a pre brief in the early parts of a program spread the cards out before the group and have them pick a card that best represents where they are at that moment. At the very beginning of the day/program, spread the cards out before the group and have them pick a card that best represents where they are at that moment. Ask them how they are feeling and to pick a card that matches where they are mentally coming into the day. Go around the group and ask each participant to share why they picked the card they did and why that card represents them or where they are. If you start the day with this activity, it is good to end the day with this same activity.
- Spread the cards out before the group and have them pick a card that best represents an experience or a feeling that they had during the activity or at the end of the day. You can do this at the end of the day or after an activity. Go around the group and ask each participant to share

why they picked the card they did and why that card represents them or an experience they have had. Participants can each pick their own card, then draw it or write about in their journal.

## Technique #4 Frontloading

In its simplest form, **Frontloading** refers to giving an example *before the experience* rather than afterwards. By giving the participants an example of the type of answer you are expecting, it makes the debriefing process much easier. Kids learn by example, so if they hear a good example they will most likely follow your lead. Frontloading gives participants a sense of the task purpose, expectations for behavior and motivation for coming up with their answer.

### Body Part Debrief™

The Body Part Debrief™ activity is a great activity for both new and seasoned facilitators. It is simple enough in nature that groups of any age will use it with ease. The body parts have a ‘coolness’ factor to them that fosters a safe environment for people to talk. If you are having a hard time getting your participants to share or reflect, this activity will help solve that problem.

The basic concept for this activity is that you have different balls or objects that are shaped like body parts. Each part can represent a metaphor related to that part. For example:

**Eye:** Could represent something new that you saw in yourself or someone else. What vision do you have for yourself/the group?

**Stomach:** Could represent something that took guts for you to do. What pushed you outside your comfort zone?

**Brain:** Could represent something new that you learned about yourself, a teammate, or the group. What did you learn through your experience?

**Heart:** Could represent a feeling that you experienced. What things come from the heart?

**Hand:** In what way did the group support you? Could represent someone you would like to give a hand to for a job well done.

**Ear:** Could represent something you listened to or a good idea you heard. Could represent something that was hard to hear—did you receive constructive feedback or not-so-constructive feedback.



## Technique #5 Intervention Tools

Sometimes with our groups we have to stop the fun and games and have hard conversations with participants. This could result from a negative behavior from an individual or a group behavior that needs to be addressed. This next tool is one of my favorite tools to use when you have to have a hard conversation.

### Traffic Debrief

The three colors on the stoplight can be used as metaphors for behaviors: What are you doing well? (green light) What do you need to be careful of? (yellow light) What do you need to stop doing? (red light).

Present a stoplight to the group to set the stage for targeted metaphoric processing. When a group has started to show negative behavior patterns, or if a conflict arises, use the metaphor of the stoplight to debrief the situation. **Frontload** your discussion with examples for each color. You could also have the group give suggestions for each color. Following are examples of processing questions and information that relate to the Stoplight.

- **RED:** What are things happening in the group that need to STOP in order for us to be more successful? The usual answers are to stop teasing, horseplay, put-downs, blaming, etc.
- **YELLOW:** What are things we need to be CAREFUL of as we continue? Suggestions have included keeping everyone safe, listening to all ideas, being aware of personal choices and boundaries, etc.
- **GREEN:** What are things we want to GO for? This could be group goals, as well as behavior suggestions. Ideas have included being respectful, encouraging more, setting time limits, etc.

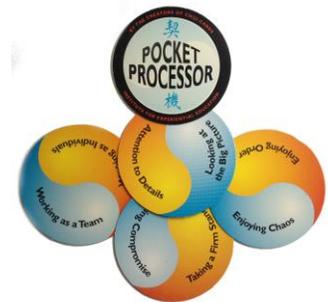


If it wouldn't be a distraction, the stoplight can be handed out to a specific individual who will monitor those ideas for the group. This person can be asked to report on what they observed at the end of the activity or session. For example; the person designated to carry the stoplight is asked to let the group know any time he sees an infraction of behavior norms. He could call a group discussion, point to the yellow light and say, —We had stated we wanted to be careful of listening to everyone's ideas before we started. Are we listening to everyone?

## Technique #6 Self Reflection

**The Pocket Processor:** The Pocket Processor is a processing tool based on the theory of the yin and the yang. This theory describes two ends of a continuum, with each end having the seed of the other. The Pocket Processor helps participants examine the flow along the continuum. Human Continuum variation: Put a piece of rope in the center of the room.

Ask everyone to stand on the line. Then read the two sides of the card and allow every participant to physically place himself or herself anywhere on that continuum. For example, a facilitator can say, "This side of the room is always taking charge." The other side of the room is always, "allowing others to lead." I want each of you to find the place on the continuum where you most fit today."



## Technique # 7 Anchor Pieces

Anchor pieces are small trinkets or mementos of your program that participants take home with them. These objects will anchor the learning and experiences they had back to your program. Groups seem to go more in depth about their ideas and feelings when they attach their thoughts to a symbol or picture. Because participants share about a card or object rather than directly about themselves they are often more willing to share. Often more reserved members are drawn to expressing themselves through the use of these symbols.



### Postcard Processing

As a pre brief - in the early parts of a program spread Postcards or trinkets out before the group and have them pick a one that best represents where they are at that moment. Ask them how they are feeling and to pick a card that matches where they are mentally coming into the day. Go around the group and ask each participant to share why they picked the card they did and why that card represents them or where they are. If you start the day with this activity, it is good to end the day with this same activity.



Debrief - Spread the objects/postcards out before the group and have them pick one that best represents an experience or a feeling that they had during the activity or at the end of the day. You can do this at the end of the day or after an activity. Ask participants to share why they picked the object or picture and why it represents them or an experience they have had.

Take away- Ask each participant to pick a card that best represents their experience. On the cards write a note to yourself or another person. Take this card with you and “deliver” it to yourself/others at a later date.

## Technique #8 Artistic Methods

Artistic Methods allow participants to have creative freedom to express their learning through different mediums. This could be through art projects, musical methods or videography.

### Community Puzzle, available from Training Wheels

Puzzles can be incorporated into reflective learning in a variety of ways. Puzzles create a unique atmosphere in which each participant can contribute an equal piece. Puzzle pieces can work as a metaphor for the role participants take in activities. They can act as a space to create artistic representations of a participant’s strengths, or contributions to the group. They can create a “picture” of the group and its experiences and goals piece by piece.

There are many ways to use The Community Puzzle. The only limit is your imagination. We recommend having each person decorates a puzzle piece in his/her own style, usually, but not always using a common theme. You can have them color on their puzzle piece to represent a ‘piece’ of learning that they are going to take away from the program, or how they are an essential ‘piece’ of the team.



## Technique #9 Action and Reflection

Traditionally processing has involved sitting a group of participants down in a circle after an activity and having the facilitator ask participants questions regarding their reactions to experience. Though this activity can be effective, it can be tiresome for everyone involved if it is the only processing method used. Also in this method, the facilitator is directing the participants rather than students interpreting the experience for them. Some variations of this activity that will liven it up and give more control to the participants are listed below:

### Shuffle Left, Shuffle Right (Debriefing in Motion)

Some folks have remarked that it takes more energy for an 11 year old boy to stand still, than it does for them to move! For participants that need to move during a debriefing session, here is a perfect solution.

**Concepts:** Providing some kinesthetic movement during a reviewing session can maintain the energy of the group, and keep those high energy folks engaged by being active.

#### Directions:

- Begin by asking the group to form one large circle. Groups may decide to place their arms around their neighbors, hold hands, or simple stand unconnected next to each other.
- The facilitator offers the group the chance to ‘have their say.’ This may be related to a particular question, or the previous activity, or be open to any viewpoint that a person in the group wishes to share. It is often helpful for the facilitator to go first, and demonstrate the style (and length) of response.
- The activity begins with the group shuffling to the left.
- At some point, the facilitator says – stop!! and then gives their comment to the group.
- Next, they say – shuffle right, and the entire group shuffles right, until someone else says – stop!! and has their say.

### Debriefing Thumball™

The Debriefing Thumball™ was designed to help facilitators ask debriefing questions in a proper sequence that makes sense to participants. It can also shift some of the responsibility for successful processing from the facilitator to the participants. Using the sequence of:

1. **What happened,**
2. **Why is this important,** and
3. **How can I use this information,**

not only takes participants through a progression for processing a specific event, but also presents an overall lesson on proper processing.



## Technique #10 Object Lesson

Object lessons are processing tools that could be classified as a separate activity, but actually teach a lesson to prove a point. Our favorite example of this technique is the activity, The UFO Ball.

### UFO Ball

This UFO Ball may look like a simple ping-pong ball with two pieces of metal, but when both pieces of metal are touched simultaneously, the ball lights up and makes noise!. Use it to teach the value of connection in your team. The ball will activate if you have a group of 10 people all connected hand to hand--if one person disconnects from the team the ball will stop making noise. This can be a powerful metaphor to reflect on the effects on a team when someone is not giving 100%



### Workshop Notes:

## Recommended Reading and Publications

*A Teachable Moment*, a Facilitator's Guide to Activities for Processing, Debriefing, Reviewing, and Reflecting. Jim Cain, Michelle Cummings, Jennifer Stanchfield, 2004. Kendall Hunt Publishing. ISBN: 075751782X

*Playing With a Full Deck*, 52 Team Activities Using a Deck of Playing Cards. Michelle Cummings, 2007. Kendall Hunt Publishing. ISBN: 07575-4094-5

*Setting the Conflict Compass*, Activities for Conflict Resolution and Prevention. Michelle Cummings, Mike Anderson, 2010. Kendall Hunt Publishing. ISBN-978-0-7575-8457-2

*Open to Outcome*, Micah Jacobsen and Mari Ruddy, 2005, Wood N Barnes Publishing. ISBN: 1885473591

*Processing Pinnacle*, An Educator's Guide to Better Processing by Steve Simpson, PhD, Dan Miller & Buzz Bocher, 2006, Wood N Barnes Publishing. ISBN: 188547363X

*Tips and Tools: the Art of Experiential Group Facilitation*, Jennifer Stanchfield, 2008. Wood N Barnes Publishing. ISBN: 1885473710

*The Book of Raccoon Circles*, Jim Cain, Tom Smith. 2006. ISBN-978-0-7575-3265-8

### Michelle Cummings, Presenter



Michelle Cummings M.S. is the Big Wheel and founder of Training Wheels, a known leader in the Team Development industry. She is an accomplished author and is a sought-after speaker and consultant on leadership, teambuilding, and experiential learning. Michelle has created a wide variety of facilitation, debriefing and teambuilding activities that have collectively changed the way trainers and educators work.

Michelle has authored 4 books to date and a 5<sup>th</sup> is in its final stages.

Michelle, along with Dr. Jim Cain and Jennifer Stanchfield are the authors of the renowned book, ***A Teachable Moment, A Facilitator's Guide to Activities for Processing, Debriefing, Reviewing, and Reflection***. The book has over 120 different processing tools, activities, and techniques for facilitators.

Michelle is also the author of ***Bouldering Games for Kids, an Educational Guide for Traverse Walls, Playing With a Full Deck, 52 Team Activities Using a Deck of Cards***, and ***Setting the Conflict Compass, a Facilitator's Guide for Conflict Resolution Activities***.

Sign up for Michelle's free games newsletter to receive updates on these titles and for free activities online at [www.training-wheels.com](http://www.training-wheels.com).



### The Spokesperson E-Newsletter

The Spokesperson e-newsletter, Tips for Trainers and Wheel of a Deal Wednesday emails are free services that subscribers can anticipate receiving once a week. The content varies from an Activity of the Month, a Book of the Month, a Non-Prop Activity of the Month, and great facilitator tips and tools. You will receive fresh ideas and innovative

activities each week to enhance your facilitation skills and practice.

Each person who signs up is entitled to a copy of the free e-book, *Playing With a Full Deck*. It has 9 sample activities from Michelle Cummings book, *Playing With a Full Deck, 52 Team Activities Using a Deck of Cards*. The link for this book will be emailed to you when you subscribe to the newsletter.

**Sign Up Online at [www.training-wheels.com](http://www.training-wheels.com)**



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Need more to processing than sitting in a circle, asking questions, and talking about what happened? This workshop is designed to introduce you to a multitude of different processing tools that are simple and easy to use. You will learn how to make/do the activities yourself or find out where to get them. You can increase the quality and value of your programs through powerful reflective learning.

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This workshop is designed to teach you some initiatives that will help participants become aware of they way they treat each other. It will encourage educators to facilitate and work for social awareness and change in their programs, schools, and communities. From bullying to diversity awareness to inclusion--this workshop enhance your ever-expanding bag of tricks.

### **Keynotes & Conferences**

Bring Michelle to your conference! We offer a lively, interactive approach to kick off or energize your meetings that will engage and invigorate your members! Not only will they enjoy themselves, but they will also learn a number of new tools and activities that they can immediately use in the workplace. All of our material is highly interactive and engaging. Attendees will be involved physically, intellectually, and mentally, with lots of opportunity for laughter and learning.