

SEXUAL ORIENTATION DEBRIEFING

AIM

The debriefing approach is being used as a means to assist commanders and senior leaders to recognize the type and strength of reactions to alternative sexual orientation and to develop effective leadership principles and practices to deal with such reactions. The need for debriefings on this topic is based on two premises:

- a. significant numbers of personnel will have difficulty accepting the policy of non-exclusion on grounds of sexual orientation and may find it difficult to behave in an appropriate manner if they encounter a known or expected homosexual; and,
- b. the formal and informal structure of the organization will be affected by the reactions of personnel to this policy.

The debriefing approach is designed to be participative and should allow for a high degree of ventilation of strong reactions; validation of values, beliefs and attitudes based on correct information; clarification/correction of misconceptions; and affirmation of non-discriminatory leadership principles.

TARGET GROUPS

Debriefings will be conducted with Commanding Officers of ships, shore establishments and units, Executive Officers and Coxswains; Commandants, Division Commanders, Div XO's and Div Chiefs of Fleet Schools; and Base Commanders, Branch Heads and Branch Chiefs at Bases. As is deemed appropriate groups can be comprised of officers, senior NCMs or both. Groups of no more than 30 personnel can be debriefed at one time.

Both coasts, as well as Regular and Naval Reserve units should be included in a hierarchical approach (i.e. not all units can be debriefed at the same time, a priority of briefings will have to be determined). Some higher formation leaders will need to be debriefed first so that they can chair debriefings for personnel on their staff.

TIMINGS

Debriefings should be conducted in as close proximity to the official policy announcement as possible; ideally prior to that announcement. Each debriefing can be expected to take a minimum of one and a half hours, however only one per morning and afternoon should be scheduled to avoid any possible conflict.

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LOCATION

Any conference room that can hold 30 people and is relatively quiet (D201 first floor conference room is ideal) can be used to conduct the debriefings.

APPROACH

The debriefing team will consist of a Chair, who will be an officer from higher in the same chain of command than the leaders to be debriefed (e.g. D5 when COs, XO's and Cox'ns from D5 ships are being debriefed) and one or two mental health professionals (Soc Wk, Psychologists, and PSOs) trained in Critical Incident Stress Debriefings and facilitating group processes.

The debriefing process will consist of five phases:

Introductory Phase. The Chair will commence the debriefing by describing the details of the policy announcement. In this phase it is critical to set the tone for the rest of the debriefing by stating that it is an important policy change and one to which many personnel will have reactions. Since it is realized that these reactions may affect our ability to get on with the primary job, it is necessary to discuss the likely reactions of your personnel and means to ensure the continued operational effectiveness of all units.

The Chair should introduce the facilitators and indicate that their role will be to note the most common reactions for further discussion and to point out some findings from research with other military and non-military groups.

The Chair's role will be to show support for open and frank discussion and to model the need for professional leadership behavior regardless of personally held beliefs, values or attitudes pertaining to sexual orientation.

Reaction Phase. The questions "What are the likely reactions of your personnel to the sexual orientation policy change?" and "What are your own reactions?" will be asked. Facilitators should note the content and strength of reactions described. Facilitators may probe for more information or clarification as they see fit. All individuals who wish to will be allowed to speak, some who are reluctant will be encouraged to comment, however no one will be forced to speak.

Common Theme Phase. Facilitators should note the common themes (using blackboard or flipchart) described during the reaction phase. Personnel should be asked what homosexuals or lesbians who they have known have been like. Themes should be noted here, too.

Facilitators should note that our reactions to homosexuality

and lesbianism come from our values, beliefs and attitudes. These are developed within our families, our religious upbringing, our schooling and society in general and are based on our experiences. When our values, beliefs and attitudes are negative, directed to a specific group and persist in the face of new knowledge they become prejudice. When our actions or words reflect our prejudice they become discriminatory.

Facilitators should point out that no one is being asked to change their personally held values and that they have the right to hold such values. What they are being asked to do is examine their values in light of facts on sexual orientation and consider their behavior in terms of being a highly professional leader.

Fact Phase. Referring back to the discussion of reactions, facilitators should describe the facts pertaining to sexual orientation and clarify common misconceptions (see handout), especially any that were brought up in the reaction phase. Personnel may not be comfortable with this information, and again it may be necessary to point out that they are not being asked to change their personally held values, but to be aware of facts.

Leadership Phase. The Chair should, at this point, take a more active part in the discussion by pointing out the need for Navy personnel to behave in a highly professional, non-discriminatory manner. He/she should further define this as the need to lead by positive example. Language, behavior and humour that are indicative of intolerance to alternative sexual orientation will only serve as a negative leadership model and may be taken by subordinates as condoning extreme, dangerous and even illegal behavior.

The Chair should reiterate the policy and pertinent regulations. He/she should clearly state the expectations of personnel in leadership positions:

- a. keep negative attitudes to themselves while modelling professional behaviors that value personnel for their capabilities and skills;
- b. recognize that subordinates have a right to their personally held values, beliefs and attitudes, as does everyone;
- c. provide accurate, factual information to subordinates (a handout will be provided); and,
- d. convey the expectation to all personnel that professional, non-discriminatory behavior is expected at all times. Verbal or physical harassment, violence or any other inappropriate behavior will not be tolerated.

The Chair should direct the leaders who have just been debriefed to have similar debriefing sessions with personnel in

leadership positions under their command. The assistance with or advice on these follow-on debriefings by the facilitators should be offered at this time. A letter from Commander Maritime Command, outlining the expectations of leaders mentioned above, should be provided to all attendees at the end of the debriefing.

HOMOSEXUALITY AND LESBIANISM

- individuals who feel love and attraction more strongly for members of their own sex than for those of the opposite sex.

- a gay or lesbian may have had considerable anguish and difficulty accepting their own sexual preferences because of the societal values which they have been brought up in, too.

- estimates are that up to 10% of the Canadian population are exclusively or partially homosexual.

- 1948 Kinsey report found that 37% of men had engaged in sexual conduct with a man at least once.

- heterosexuals dislike of homosexuality (in others) may be because of:

- religious beliefs that believe sex is for procreation and have therefore deemed sex that cannot result in procreation as a sin;

- fear of being attacked or propositioned;

- seeing homosexuality as a threat to a masculine self-image that includes prowess with women/attractiveness to men;

- fear of unresolved homosexual latency.

MISCONCEPTIONS

- not a mental illness, but a viable lifestyle alternative.

- just as well adjusted as the heterosexual population, suffering and hardship comes from society's reaction to the homosexual rather than anything inherent to them.

- all homosexuals are not pedophiles; 90% of child sexual abuse is heterosexual men against small girls.

- not visible by characteristics or mannerisms.

- not all interested in the theatre, art or hairdressing.

- not untrustworthy, excessively interested in sexual liaisons, unable to form lasting relationships, flighty or superficial.

- do not hate the opposite sex.
- lesbians are not necessarily rageful and aggressive.

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