

CRITICAL INCIDENT SCENARIO REFLECTION & EXPLORATION: MENTAL HEALTH - ASSESSMENT TASK 1

Why do a critical incident report and reflection?

By reflecting on the scenario of your critical incident, you are making links between the theories you are learning in Mental Health 1: Therapeutic Communication and the real world. The more you think about the ideas and concepts in your course area and connect them to what you experience and see around you, the more you learn and the more you are able to apply this knowledge in your daily interactions and professional practice.

What do I write about?

The incident

- You should select an incident that lets you explore a range of communication issues from the Mental Health 1: Therapeutic Communication course. Although this is called a critical incident report, the incident doesn't need to be highly dramatic. It should involve an event that was unusual and noteworthy, and provides opportunities to explore communication issues.
- Your incident needs to be a single incident. Ideally you should focus on a single conversation or interaction that happened on one particular day. Avoid a detailed description of an ongoing difficult relationship or long histories of people who cannot get along (your difficult history may certainly be a contributing variable to the incident and as such could be included in the discussion of the variables).
- You need describe the situation in an objective and unemotional way. It can be difficult to objectively discuss a highly emotional or personal event. It might be easier to write about a situation that is not emotionally charged.
- The incident provides a background to explore communication issues. Focus only on the key elements of the incident needed to give the facts: who, where, when etc. Explain only as much as is necessary to understand the incident.
- Telling the story of the incident is not the main focus of the assignment; check the marking guide, and you can see it is only worth 5 marks. You might find you need to rewrite this section several times to make it concise and keep the number of words written proportionate to the marks.

Discussion and reflection

- You must discuss the variables that contributed to the incident. To do this you must have a clear understanding of the ideas and theories introduced in your lectures and have done additional reading. Your analysis of the variables should link your scenario to the course content.
- Be sure to explicitly include intrapersonal and interpersonal factors affected the incident.
- Which communication variables (e.g. values, roles, body language, emotions) impacted on your critical incident? Note, each student's scenario will be unique; therefore, you must discuss the factors that most affected your scenario.
- Use the literature (books, articles, etc.) to support your analysis of your particular incident, not discuss communication in general. Make sure your reference the literature accurately.
- You need to be balanced and fair in your analysis of the actions of the people involved in your scenario, especially yourself. Your analysis needs to be logical.

Recommendations

- The recommendations need to be based on the variables discussed in the body of your report.
- Note the assignment outline states that you should list *five* strategies for improvement.
- The recommendations should include a rationale; that is, you should not only say *what* should be done to improve the communication but also *why* it would be beneficial.
- It will be good to use the literature (i.e. references) to support your claim that the strategies can lead to improved outcomes.

Writing style

Although the assignment is about your experience, it should still be written in formal, objective academic writing style. It should be written in the third person. References should be used to link your incident to the theories and ideas studied in class (see example on page 2).

Excerpt from a student's report with comments. Note, this is one way of organising the report; there are other ways in which you can structure your report (e.g. background, discussion, reflection, recommendations).

<p>Introduction</p> <p>.....</p>	<p><i>Outlines purpose of the report</i></p>
<p>Background to the incident</p> <p>.....</p>	<p><i>Describes the incident</i></p>
<p>Discussion of variables and reflection on their impact</p> <p>.....</p>	
<p><i>Environment</i></p> <p>The physical environment in this scenario was noisy and cramped, taking place in a small cubicle adjacent to the emergency department. Distraction levels, therefore, interrupted the flow of dialogue between Nicole and James. The space available, and therefore, the physical distance between James and Nicole is another aspect of the physical environment that impacted on James's agitation. The proxemics, or the personal distance between communicators, impacts on people's comfort level and anxiety (McLaughlin, Olson, & White, 2008). As James was already agitated, his need for personal space added to the difficulties he experienced...</p>	<p><i>Identifies a key variable (environment)</i></p> <p><i>Student discusses impact of variable</i></p> <p><i>Analyses specific aspect of environment</i></p> <p><i>Student links to theory; includes reference</i></p> <p><i>Analyses & reflects on impact on participant</i></p>
<p><i>Emotions</i></p> <p>Another variable that affected the situation was Nicole's current emotions, involving her sick child, along with her lack of sleep, which could also have created potential barriers to active listening. Active listening is a complex skill that requires full attention from the listener (Jones, 2009; Smith, 2010; Xue, 2009). Because Nicole did not listen as actively as she would normally do, this contributed to the problem leading to ...</p>	<p><i>Identifies other variables & how they influenced the interaction</i></p> <p><i>Introduces theory related to interaction</i></p> <p><i>Reflects on how this hindered her communication</i></p>
<p>Recommendations:</p> <p>A number of strategies could be applied to minimise the problems that occurred in the scenario and reduce their reoccurrence in future situations. Nicole could improve.....</p> <p>Furthermore, the physical environment could have been improved by locating a quieter cubicle or reallocating to a more private space, which may also have reduced James's anxiety (Keller, 2010).</p>	<p><i>Topic sentence introduces improvement strategies</i></p> <p><i>Identifies a skill that could be improved</i></p> <p><i>Identifies a variable that could be improved & explains why this would be beneficial; includes reference linking privacy and reduced anxiety</i></p>
<p>Conclusion</p> <p>.....</p>	<p><i>Sums up report</i></p>