Step 3.1 – Describe Event

Interview Guidelines

Introduction

The goal of an interview is to find out what happened by collecting information about the event from participants and eye witnesses. This is part of an investigative process. Information gathered from the interview is used to help complete a timeline of the event in preparation for root cause analysis.

How to Use

Having clear information from the persons that witnessed or participated in the event will assure the most accurate information. Follow these guidelines to help ensure an effective interview with all persons involved in an event. Then, use this information to create a timeline of what happened.

Interview Guidelines

- Set the date/time for interviews, as soon as possible after the event, to help gather the best recollection from the involved persons. Interviewing as soon as possible also aids in memory recollection, defuses gossip, reduces speculation, and placing blame on individuals.
- It’s recommended that the interviewer communicate directly with the persons to be interviewed. Stress that the purpose of the interview is for information gathering.
- Interviews are best handled with one person responsible for the interview process. Being interviewed by more than one person at a time can be intimidating. If you need a second person there to take notes, reassure the participant of the note taker’s role. Taping the interview should be done only if necessary. If the event outcome was serious harm or death to an individual, the interview may need to be taped depending on the organization’s needs.
- Interviews should be conducted in a private and relaxed area, away from the work area.
- Allow 45-60 minutes for the interview, so there is plenty of time to ask questions, as well as answer any that the person might have.
- Listen actively to the participant and clarify what is said. A good way to start the interview is to check in with the person and ask what they are feeling. Create a feeling of trust. Encourage the participant not to withhold any information. They should have no fear of repercussions.
- Be open. Gather information and understand what the participants went through. You are trying to find facts, not make judgments about what happened. Never give your opinion about what is said or about the event. Be aware of your tone and body language.
- It's the interviewer’s responsibility to keep participants comfortable. They may be anxious, defensive, or afraid. If those emotions begin to block the interview, address

them before going on. Say, "I'm sensing some anger; help me understand what's going on here." Don't be challenging or confrontational.

- Ask open questions, such as
    - "What happened next?"
    - "How is it usually done?"
    - "What do you think led up to that?"

  Seek the person's opinions and feelings as well as their knowledge.
- Always pay staff for their time involved in interviews and make that clear when setting the interview date/time. Whenever possible, keep interviews from interfering with scheduled work time.
- When interviewing staff, reinforce that the purpose is not to focus on "Who's at fault," but to look for ways to improve the processes and systems.
- If the participant wishes someone else to be present during the interview, allow that since keeping their stress to a minimum will help you get the best information.
- Establish a chronology of the event according to their recollection. Ask the participant to provide as much information as possible. You want to find out what happened and clarify any details or processes that may be area specific versus the organizational policy.
- Review and clarify any documentation the participant provided such as incident reports or notes in the medical record.
- At the end of the interview, thank the participant and any others present.
- Encourage the participant to contact you if they have any additional information to share.

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