

# Decompression Time Policy Template

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**Policy Type** | Intended for Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence agencies, this policy helps to build-in an organizational culture that counters the inherent secondary trauma of the work, and instead promotes employee wellness

**Purpose** | To support the emotional well-being, resilience, and safety of staff working in Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence programs. Structured decompression practices help prevent burnout, reduce secondary traumatic stress, and promote long-term staff wellness and retention.

**Implementation** | Organizations should insert language in their Handbook that explicitly states how decompression time is provided and why it is prioritized for employee wellbeing. Agencies may implement a process for utilizing decompression time, with details on:

- Types of Decompression Time: what type or length of decompression time does the agency provide? Options can include any or all of the following:
  - Brief term: taken for 10-25 minutes, employees may use this as a quick “reset” after stressful interactions or between tasks
  - Extended term: 20-60 minutes, employees may use this time after major incidents with intense emotional demand and labor
  - Full Shift Adjustment: in rare cases, employees can take decompression time for the remainder of their shift, especially when they are unable to safely complete their typical duties
- Where and How: where will decompression time be taken? How should staff notify leadership they need to utilize decompression time?
- Leadership/Supervisor Responsibility: what steps will supervisors take to approve use of decompression time and ensure proper coverage for shift tasks? How will leadership create and provide decompression space for staff?

- Cultural Considerations: ensure your policy permits for culturally-applicable decompression practices such as smudging, meditation and prayer, or traditional grounding techniques

## **Key Components :**

- Policy applies to all employees, contractors, and volunteers providing direct and indirect services within the program, including advocacy, shelter, case management, hotline operations, outreach, prevention, and administrative support.
  - Supervisors are responsible for:
    - Creating an environment that supports decompression such as a designated quiet room and/or wellness tools (aroma therapies/scents, coloring supplies, stress balls, etc.)
    - Modeling healthy decompression practices
    - Ensuring proper coverage for tasks during staff decompression time
    - Provide emotional support and debriefing to team members
  - Staff are responsible for:
    - Notifying leadership when decompression time is needed
    - Using decompression time for wellness and grounding
    - Communicating their readiness to return to duties following decompression time
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## ***Policy Language Template & Example:***

\*Text that is italicized and underlined denotes where an agency should insert their own language with their own processes\*

Decompression Time: *Organization name* recognizes our work is challenging, demanding, and may even be traumatizing. Because we value the wellness of our team, *Organization name* wants to ensure all staff have access to supports--such as decompression time--for their mental, emotional, and physical safety.

Designated decompression time may be requested by staff or offered by leadership after:

- Assisting a survivor in crisis

- Responding to severe trauma or violence
- Managing a difficult hotline call or walk-in
- Responding to emergencies at shelter,
- Participating in a high-conflict interaction
- Completing a forensic exam advocacy
- Hearing multiple traumatic stories within a shift
- Experiencing personal emotional overwhelm
- Any other time where deemed necessary by supervisor and/or staff

Decompression activities may include but are not limited to:

- Deep breathing, stretching, and calming activities
- Coloring, painting, and/or other creative art therapies
- Peer Support and debrief
- Smudging, meditation, prayer, or other traditional/cultural practices

Additionally, decompression time is available to all employees, volunteers, and contractors with Organization name and may be taken in employee's private office and/or in the designated space. There are three types of designated decompression time staff may choose from:

- Brief (10-25 minutes)
- Extended (25-60 minutes)
- Full-shift (60+ minutes-full shift, when staff cannot complete/return to their duties)

To take designated decompression time, staff should notify their chosen leadership with a written and/or verbal request form. Chosen leadership then ensure coverage of any urgent or requisite tasks. Staff are responsible for informing chosen leadership when their decompression time is completed and they are ready to return to their tasks.