



Critical Incident Reflection Tool CIRT[©] for dietitians

A time-efficient reflective practice tool

The **Critical Incident Reflection Tool (CIRT[©])¹** is a **time-efficient, structured reflective practice tool** that can assist practitioners to debrief cases involving psychological issues, and other complex issues. The CIRT adopts a positive approach, to help you recognise and acknowledge your existing transferable knowledge and skills, identify learning gaps, and opportunities for professional development.

What is a 'critical incident'?

The term **'critical incident'** refers to a **particularly demanding work situation** that you handled either successfully or unsuccessfully. In this context, the term 'critical' does not mean life threatening; rather it is a significant situation, event or opportunity that has occurred in your practice that stimulates reflection and may lead to further professional development.²

The CIRT[®] is based on the 'Critical Incident Interview' developed by Patricia Benner² in the mid 1980's. The Critical Incident technique is used throughout the health sciences for debriefing and to distinguish the features of competent practice. It focuses on identifying knowledge, techniques and attitudes that underlie competence and confidence but cannot be easily explained or identified by practitioners. It also allows the exploration of feelings and concerns.

When to use the CIRT[©]

The CIRT[©] helps to streamline your debriefing/reflective practice following complex or demanding clients, cases or situations. For example, **the CIRT is useful to debrief after a consultation/session that has been sidetracked** because your client:

- Appears depressed or unresponsive
- Has experienced a trauma or crisis recently
- Has significant life issues to deal with such as cancer, kidney disease, heart attack, stroke, divorce or death of a partner/family member
- Experiences disordered eating or has other emotional issues such as low self esteem
- Has a mental health condition (e.g. depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, dementia),

Critical Incident Reflection Tool

1. What was the context of the situation/setting?
2. Tell me about the background of the case/client?
3. Tell me what happened with this client?
4. Why was the incident critical?
5. What were your concerns?
6. What were you thinking about at the time?
7. What were you feeling during the incident?
8. What were you feeling afterwards?
9. What was demanding about the incident?
10. What was satisfying about the incident?
11. What did you learn from this incident?
12. What did you do well?
13. What else do you need to work on, or need help with, to expand your skills?
14. How will you achieve this?
15. Are you ok? Should you get further support?

How to use the CIRT©

To get the most value out of the tool, the questions are designed to be discussed with a mentor, supervisor or colleague (either face-to-face, phone or Skype). The general order of the questions is important to allow you time to explore your perceptions of the situation, prior to reflecting on opportunities for improvement. Discussions usually take 15-30 minutes per critical incident (e.g. case).

To further enhance learning, the CIRT© can be used in conjunction with the following CPD tools:

1. **DA Scope of Practice Decision Tool**³
2. **Mental Health and Wellbeing Decision Tree (MHWDT)**⁴
3. **Dietetic Confidence Scale (DCS) for working with clients experiencing psychological issues**⁵

Question 13 is an appropriate time to incorporate these tools. These tools are available free for DA members via DINER on the DA website (www.dietitiansaustralia.org.au)

References

1. Dietitians Association of Australia. Critical Incident Reflection Tool (CIRT). In Mental Health in Tertiary Curricula for Dietitians Phase 2 Final Project Report. Canberra: DAA, 2009. Retrieved 16 February, 2017, from <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/103457>
2. Benner PE. From novice to expert: excellence and power in clinical nursing practice. Menlo Park, California: Addison-Wesley, Nursing Division, 1984.
3. Dietitians Australia. Dietitian Scope of Practice. 2017. Retrieved February 1, 2017, from <https://dietitiansaustralia.org.au/maintaining-professional-standards/dietitian-scope-of-practice> [DAA members only]
4. Dietitians Australia. Mental Health and Wellbeing Decision Tree. 2017. Retrieved February 1, 2017, from member.dietitiansaustralia.org.au via Resource Library [DA members only]
5. Buttenshaw K, Ash S & Shakespeare-Finch J. Development and validation of the Dietetic Confidence Scale for working with clients experiencing psychological issues. *Nutr Diet*, 2017;74:36- doi:10.1111/1747-0080.1229