



Protocol for the Hot, Walk & Talk

Developed by Dr. Patricia Fisher
COVID-19 adaptation



The Hot, Walk & Talk protocol was developed by Dr. Patricia Fisher in 2012 as a strategy to assist a team member following a particularly distressing or disturbing incident and is undergoing a completely normal stress reaction.

Although this protocol was initially designed for situations in which we can physically be near a colleague, it can be adapted to the current COVID-19 situation as a tool to help colleagues and peers who are experiencing a stress reaction.

Remember that when we are experiencing a high stress response, our body is in the flight, fight or freeze state. In this state, we are being flooded with stress hormones and are likely experiencing a negative physical, emotional or cognitive response.

The following steps can be useful to help safely and kindly guide someone through a negative stress reaction.

- **Safety first:** Ensure that the person is physically out of danger. Instruct the person to walk away from the area where the incident occurred and toward a neutral or safe area. Encourage them to get outside if they are able.
- **Drink:** Ask the person to get a bottle of water to drink while they walk.
- **Walk:** If it is prudent to do so, you can walk with the person, otherwise, this process can be done over the phone. Encourage the person to set a brisk pace to help them discharge some of the distress. As they continue to walk, they may naturally slow the pace.

- **Normalize and support:** Let them know that they are safe, that their reaction to stress is normal, and that you are there to support them.
- **Debrief:** Ask them to tell you what happened in their own words. If they get stuck on a particular moment, prompt them to move on with a guiding statement such as: “and then what happened?” The goal is to help them move through the whole narrative from beginning to the end – until they get to the present where they are walking in safety and are no longer at risk.
- **Incident report:** You may work in an environment where you are required to complete an incident report. If this is the case, ask them how you can help in completing the report. They may want you to type in the information as they dictate it, or they may simply appreciate your support while they complete the report.
- **Breathing:** Remember to remind them to focus on their breathing and open posture to help them deescalate from the stress response – especially after they have stopped walking.
- **Next steps:** After the initial debrief, ask the person what they would find helpful: do they want to phone a family member, get a snack, take a break, go back to work? They need to have control over their choices while attending to their needs.
- **Additional support:** Let the individual know that you will remain available to them and encourage them to access additional supports that may be available (e.g., Employee Assistance Programs, counselling, etc.)

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