

# Psychological First Aid

Section 1:

Introduction to Psychological First Aid (PFA)

Section 2:

The 7 Components of PFA

Section 3:

Taking Care of Yourself



# Section 1: Introduction to Psychological First Aid

- This guidance is written to support those helping others during and after serious crises and disasters. After reading this, you should be able to :
- Define PFA
- Describe the 7 key components of effective PFA
- Feel reasonably confident in delivering PFA
- Identify ways to take care of yourself while providing PFA

# What is Psychological First Aid?

- A humane, supportive and flexible response to a fellow human being who is suffering during or after a major disaster or emergency, including pandemic situations
- It assumes most people will respond to events with great resilience.
- It is for use during and in the weeks following an emergency or crisis.
- It involves:
  - Providing practical care and support where necessary
  - Helping people address basic needs and concerns
  - Helping people connect to information, services and social supports
  - Comforting people and helping them to feel calm
  - Reducing distress and fostering adaptive coping.
  - Protecting people from further harm

## What Psychological First Aid is NOT

- It is not something that everybody affected by an emergency will need.
- It is not counselling.
- It is not "psychological debriefing" in that it does not involve a detailed discussion of the events that caused the distress.
- It is not asking a person to analyse their situation.
- It is not about pressurising a person to talk about their feelings.
- It is not something that only professionals can do.

# Psychological First Aid

Psychological First Aid involves offering humane, supportive and practical help, paying attention to the factors that seem to be most helpful to people's long-term recovery (according to various studies and the consensus of many crisis helpers).

These include:

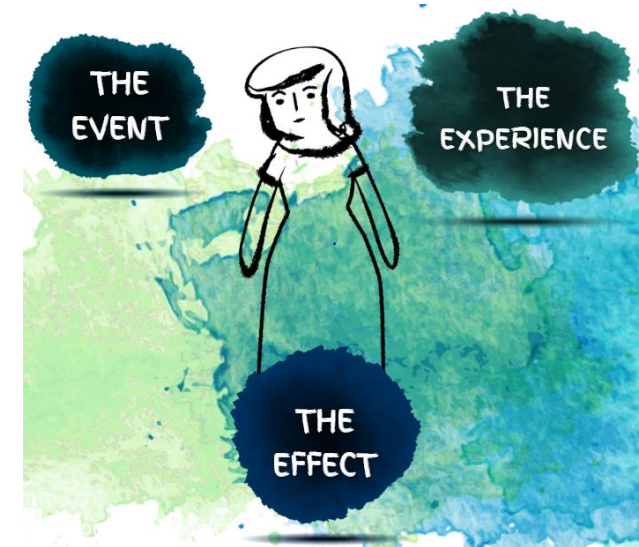
- feeling safe, connected to others, calm and hopeful;
- having access to social, physical and emotional support; and
- feeling able to help themselves, as individuals and communities.

# How do emergency events such as pandemics affect people?

Different kinds of crises affect people in different ways, and there's a wide range of responses that people can have. Most often we respond with resilience, and in ways that are designed to protect ourselves and our loved ones.

How we respond depends on a number of factors, including:

- How much support we have at the time
- Our previous experience of distressing events
- Our perceived capacity to cope with the event(s)
- The nature and severity of the event itself



## Section 2: The Seven Components of Psychological First Aid



# Key Component 1: Care for Immediate Needs

The first step of PFA is to identify if there are any immediate needs for safety, and to address these. Work with people to help to clarify their needs and develop a plan of action.

There are four key steps:

- First identify if there are any immediate needs, like for medical treatment, medication, food or accommodation
- Then clarify each need by talking it through, considering what assistance might help
- Develop an action plan together based on what resources are available, collaborating with people to enable them to make their own decisions
- Finally, support people to put this plan in to action, where possible supporting them to experience success



## Key Component 2: Protect from Further Threat & Distress

Ensuring the ongoing physical and emotional safety of people during and after the emergency. The main elements are:

- Ensure immediate physical safety, including medical care and supervision of children and those unable to take care of themselves.
- Provide accurate situation information
  - Have as up to date and accurate information as possible beforehand
  - Be accurate and honest in the information you provide
  - Avoid speculation, if you do not know the answer to a question, say so
  - Encourage people to avoid excessive exposure to media reporting
- Attend to physical comfort
  - make sure people have access to safe and comfortable environment .
- Recognise the needs of vulnerable groups, such as children and the elderly.
- Protect people from additional trauma and reminders
  - Encourage people to only access reputable sources of information, and to limit their checking of these to once or twice per day

# Key Component 3: Comfort and Console

Providing emotional comfort to people during and following an emergency. The main elements are:

- Initiate contact
  - Introduce yourself, giving your name, organisation, and role.
  - Ask people's permission to speak to them; ask for their names.
  - Address adults using their last name, unless given permission otherwise.
- Engagement
  - Speak calmly and with compassion.
  - Allow plenty time, try not to look around or seem distracted.
- Offer support to people who are grieving
  - Provide a safe environment for people to deal with their grief.
  - Listen carefully, with empathy.
  - Let people tell you what they need.
  - Stay calm and take time with people.



## THINGS TO SAY AND DO ✓

- » Try to find a quiet place to talk, and minimize outside distractions.
- » Respect privacy and keep the person's story confidential, if this is appropriate.
- » Stay near the person but keep an appropriate distance depending on their age, gender and culture.
- » Let them know you are listening; for example, nod your head or say "hmmmm..."
- » Be patient and calm.
- » Provide factual information, **if** you have it. Be honest about what you know and don't know. "I don't know, but I will try to find out about that for you."
- » Give information in a way the person can understand – keep it simple.
- » Acknowledge how they are feeling and any losses or important events they tell you about, such as loss of their home or death of a loved one. "I'm so sorry. I can imagine this is very sad for you."
- » Acknowledge the person's strengths and how they have helped themselves.
- » Allow for silence.

## THINGS NOT TO SAY AND DO ✗

- » Don't pressure someone to tell their story.
- » Don't interrupt or rush someone's story (for example, don't look at your watch or speak too rapidly).
- » Don't touch the person if you're not sure it is appropriate to do so.
- » Don't judge what they have or haven't done, or how they are feeling. Don't say: "You shouldn't feel that way," or "You should feel lucky you survived."
- » Don't make up things you don't know.
- » Don't use terms that are too technical.
- » Don't tell them someone else's story.
- » Don't talk about your own troubles.
- » Don't give false promises or false reassurances.
- » Don't think and act as if you must solve all the person's problems for them.
- » Don't take away the person's strength and sense of being able to care for themselves.
- » Don't talk about people in negative terms (for example, don't call them "crazy" or "mad").

From WHO ( 2011) Psychological First Aid: A guide for field workers.

Accessed:

[https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/44615/9789241548205\\_eng.pdf;jsessionid=E437A8B252C3B3FA9945A4CB819C73B8?sequence=1](https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/44615/9789241548205_eng.pdf;jsessionid=E437A8B252C3B3FA9945A4CB819C73B8?sequence=1)

## Key Component 4: Provide Support for Practical Tasks

Providing support for practical tasks. This may involve supporting people with their medical needs, financial needs, childcare, or with funeral arrangements.

- Before offering PFA , learn about
  - The relevant details and facts about the crisis
  - How many people are likely to be affected, and what current local and national advice is
  - What services offer what kinds of support, and how these can be accessed
  - Who else is helping – what are the local community supports?
  - Are there any immediate or ongoing dangers or security concerns?
  - Are there any things, or places to avoid?
- Support people’s resilience and sense of control when possible, to generate their own solutions.
  - Clarify options and describe what may happen.
  - Ask which option they think is best for them.
  - Help make an appointment if necessary.



# Consider a broad range of services

People may need assistance linking with:

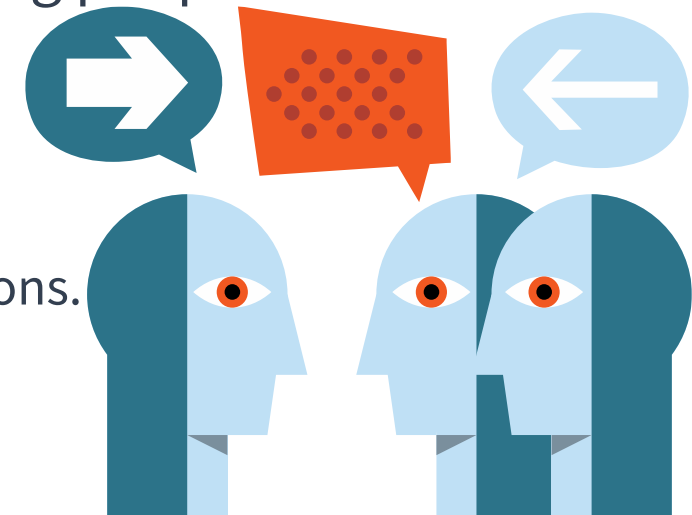
- Housing services
- Financial services
- Social services
- Childcare
- Faith-based services
- Funeral services
- Support groups



# Key Component 5: Provide Information on Coping

Providing people with information and strategies that will reduce their distress and promote coping.

- Ongoing emergency situations can be disorientating, confusing and overwhelming.
- They can compromise a person's ability to cope with problems.
- Helping to promote effective coping is an important step in helping people adjust to what has happened and plan for the future.
- You can help people:
  - Think about different coping options.
  - Identify successful coping mechanisms they've used in the past
  - Creatively adapt their normal coping strategies to social isolation conditions.
  - Understand possible negative consequences of some coping strategies.
  - Make conscious choices about how they cope.
  - Increase their sense of control



# Ways of coping: Some examples

## Helpful



- Use coping mechanisms that have worked well in the past.
- Talk to others for support.
- Engage in positive, distracting activities.
- Get enough rest, nutrition and exercise.
- Maintain as normal a schedule as possible.
- Timetable some pleasant activities.
- Take part in an online support group.
- Use humour.
- Focus on something practical that will help the situation right now.
- Understand and tolerate the different ways people cope with stress.
- Pay special attention to the reactions and behaviours of children.
- Help young people understand why adults may be behaving differently

## Unhelpful

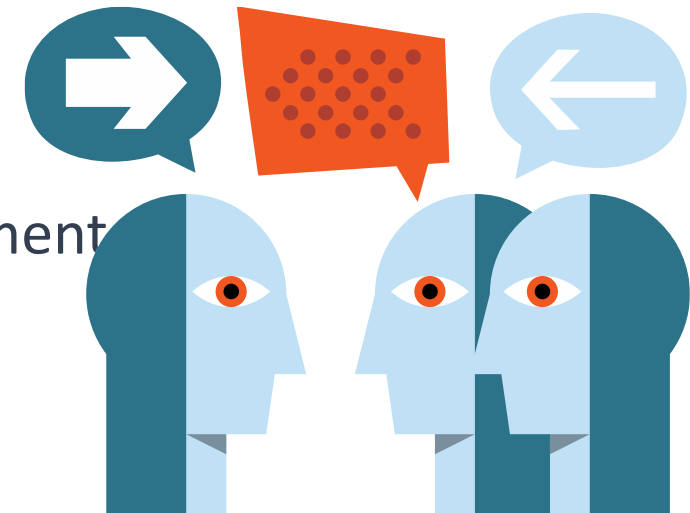


These behaviours can be seen as understandable responses to traumatic or overwhelming events, but they may lead to other problems.

- Alcohol and substance misuse.
- Withdrawing from friends and family.
- Over-eating or under-eating.
- Blaming self or others.
- Doing risky things.
- Getting violently angry

## Key Component 6: Connect with Social Support

- Supporting people to connect with their natural support networks, including their loved ones, friends and communities.
- People recover more quickly when they are connected to family and friends. It supports:
  - A sense of self-worth, well-being, confidence and hope.
  - The sharing of experiences and concerns.
  - Making sense of what has happened.
  - A degree of normality.
  - Participation in problem-solving and supporting of others.
  - The sharing of information.
- Where people are self isolating, they may need help or encouragement to connect through internet by phone or by other means.
- Community online resources can also be important.





# Key Component 7: Educate and Normalise Responses

People can experience a wide range of reactions and responses during and after an emergency situation.

We can sometimes interpret these responses as meaning there is something wrong with us

In fact they are often perfectly normal and common human reactions to abnormal events .

It is important to understand the most common responses and reactions to emergencies so that you can help people understand and normalise their reactions. Key messages:

- It's normal for people to have strong emotions in an emergency situation.
- Psychological reactions to an emergency can be best understood as the reactions of normal human beings to sudden, unexpected and terrifying events.
- Intense emotions will come and go
- People will have a range of reactions, and need to know that there is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ way to think, feel and respond. These can include:

<p><u>Shock</u> <u>Numbing</u> <u>Avoidance</u> <u>No Reaction</u></p>	<p><u>Shame</u> <u>Guilt</u> <u>Depression</u> <u>Amnesia</u></p>	<p><u>Intrusive reactions</u> <u>Dark humour</u> <u>Quest for meaning</u> <u>Physical Reactions/Pain</u></p>	<p><u>Intense emotions</u> <u>Physical arousal</u> <u>Traumatic grief</u> <u>Euphoria</u> <u>Questioning personal competence</u></p>
--	---	--	--

## Section 3: Taking Care of Yourself



- Providing patient care in a pandemic situation is stressful and may involve long hours, emotional involvement with distressed people and exposure to death and injury.
- When providing Psychological First Aid (PFA) you might feel:
  - Stressed, upset, tired, overwhelmed, inadequate and frustrated
- Thinking about how to take care of yourself is important not only for your own wellbeing but so that you can be more effective in providing PFA.

# Ways to take care of yourself:

- Seek out telephone or online contact with friends, loved ones or other people you trust for support.
- Try to keep reasonable working hours and manage the size of your workload.
- Know your limits and maintain boundaries.
- Delegate, say "no", and take time off.
- Pair up with a colleague while on assignments.
- Use time off for relaxation and recreation.
- Check-in regularly with family, friends and colleagues.
- Access supervision and peer consultation routinely, especially if you are new.
- Practise stress management.
- Take regular breaks, even for short periods.
- Minimise your intake of alcohol, caffeine or nicotine and avoid non-prescription drugs.
- Eat healthily and stay hydrated.

## Congratulations - You've reached the end of this unit.

If you can, now take a moment to:

- Reflect on how you will use the seven key components of Psychological First Aid in your work
- Create a plan for your own self care.

