

Psychological First Aid

What is Psychological First Aid?

Psychological First Aid (PFA) is an evidence-informed approach that aims to reduce stress symptoms and support a healthy recovery for children, adolescents, adults and families following a traumatic event, natural disaster or a public health emergency. PFA is based on an understanding that recovery may be helped by support from compassionate and caring disaster responders.

The goal of Psychological First Aid is to create and sustain an environment of:

- Safety
- Calm & Comfort
- Connectedness to others
- Self-efficacy or empowerment
- Hope

Why Use PFA?

It is common for people to be affected emotionally by a disaster or other traumatic event - **Disaster Stress and Grief Reactions are Normal Responses to Abnormal Events**. Emotional distress is not always as visible as a physical injury, but can be just as painful and debilitating.

Signs of Disaster-Related Stress Include

- Disorientation/Confusion
- Difficulty sleeping
- Difficulty communicating thoughts
- Increased use of drugs/alcohol
- Poor work performance
- Headaches/stomach problems
- Difficulty concentrating
- Feelings of hopelessness or helplessness
- Fear
- Grief, sadness
- Guilt and self-doubt
- Reluctance to leave home

What is the Difference Between PFA and Counseling?

PFA is not traditional psychiatric or professional mental health treatment, but rather a strategy to reduce stress reactions by providing additional support to those who have been affected by a traumatic incident. PFA addresses basic needs and reduces psychological distress by providing a caring comforting presence and education on common stress reactions. It empowers people by supporting strengths and

encouraging existing coping skills. It also provides connections to natural support networks and referrals to professional services when needed.

Do I Need to Have a Degree to Use PFA?

No. Psychological First Aid does not rely on direct services by mental health professionals, but on the skills that most of us already have. Training is required to understand how to utilize PFA.

Is There a Different PFA for Children?

Psychological First Aid for children and adolescents uses the same strategies for all ages, but with modifications to make them developmentally and age level appropriate.

Where is PFA Used?

Psychological First Aid can be provided anywhere that trauma survivors can be found- in shelters, schools, hospitals, private homes, the work place, and community settings.

Is PFA Used Differently Among Different Cultures?

Providers of Psychological First Aid must be sensitive to culture, ethnic, religious, racial and language diversity. Training in cultural competence can facilitate this awareness. PFA also encourages the use of “Cultural Leaders” for the provision of PFA services within various cultural groups. The core strategies remain the same, however inter-personal interaction and written communication should be adapted to respect and fit the needs of the impacted culture.