

Psychological First Aid (PFA)

What is Psychological First Aid?

Psychological First Aid (PFA) is an evidence-informed approach that is built on the concept of human resilience. PFA aims to reduce stress symptoms and assist in a healthy recovery following a traumatic event, natural disaster, public health emergency, or even a personal crisis.

Why use PFA?

Emotional distress is not always as visible as a physical injury, but is just as painful and debilitating.

After going through a life altering experience it is common to be effected emotionally.

- Everybody who experiences a disaster is touched by it
- Reactions manifest differently at different periods of time during and after the incident.

Some common stress reactions include:

- Confusion
- Fear
- Feelings of hopelessness and helplessness
- Sleep problems
- physical pain
- anxiety
- Anger
- Grief
- Shock
- Aggressiveness
- Withdrawal
- Guilt

- Shaken religious faith
- Loss of confidence in self or others.

While Physical First Aid is used to reduce physical discomfort due to a bodily injury, Psychological First Aid is a strategy to reduce the painful range of emotions and responses experienced by people exposed to high stress

The Goal of PFA

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

- 1) Safety
- 2) Calm & Comfort
- 3) Connectedness
- 4) Self-Empowerment, and
- 5) Hope

Psychological First Aid addresses basic needs and reduces psychological distress by providing a caring comforting presence, and education on common stress reactions. It empowers the individual by supporting strengths and encouraging existing coping skills. It also provides connections to natural support networks, and referrals to professional services when needed.

Psychological First Aid is tool that each of us can use to reduce our stress level. By understanding your stress reactions and utilizing Psychological First Aid principles, you can enhance resilience in yourself, your family, workplace, and community.

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 or emergency incident.

Do I need to have a special mental health degree to use PFA?

No, Psychological First Aid does not rely on direct services by mental health professionals, but rather on skills that most of us already have.

Who needs PFA?

Psychological First Aid can help everyone—children, adolescents, adults, elders, families, and communities who have been exposed to a traumatic or emergency incident, including responders and support service providers.

Is there a different PFA for children?

Psychological First Aid for children and adolescents uses the same basic core strategies of: safety; calm & comfort; connectedness; self-empowerment; and hope, but with modifications to make them developmentally and age level appropriate.

Where do you use PFA?

Psychological First Aid is designed to be simple and practical so that it can be used in any setting. Psychological First Aid can be provided anywhere that trauma survivors can be found - in shelters, schools, hospitals, private homes, the workplace, and community settings.

Is PFA administered differently amongst different cultures?

Psychological First Aid encourages the use of “Cultural Leaders” for the provision of PFA

services within various cultural groups. While the core strategies remain the same, inter-personal interaction and written communication should be adapted to respect and fit the needs of the impacted culture.

What do I do if someone needs more help than I can give?

When in doubt – consult! While most people will recover on their own from a traumatic incident, some people may need more intensive or professional support services.

If you feel that someone needs more help than you are qualified to provide, speak with your supervisor or a mental health professional on how to best assist the individual, or how to refer them to on to professional mental health services.

Where can I find more information on PFA?



The University of Minnesota has developed a PFA phone app and mobile website

- The mobile website can be accessed at: <http://www.sph.umn.edu/ce/perl/mobile/>
- PFA phone app is available for android and iPhones at the

Additional PFA resources are available on-line at: <http://www.health.state.mn.us/oep/responsesystems/behavioral.html>

For further information, contact:

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