

Psychological First Aid

Crawford County Volunteer
Medical Unit

Objective

- Learn basic knowledge of psychological first aid and how it can be applied
- Learn basic reactions to traumatic stress

What is Psychological First Aid?

- PFA is:
 - An evidence-informed approach to assist children, adolescents, adults, & families in the immediate aftermath of disaster & terrorism
 - Designed to reduce the initial stress caused by traumatic events, and to foster short- and long-term adaptive functioning & coping

Who is PFA for?

- Children
- Adolescents
- Parents/caretakers
- Families
- Adults
- Healthcare workers
- Law enforcement officers
- Firefighters
- EMS professionals
- Other 1st responders & disaster relief personnel

Who delivers PFA?

- All who provide acute assistance as part of the organized disaster response effort should be trained in the basics of providing PFA
 - Covers a variety of response units

When should PFA be used?

- Immediate aftermath of disasters & other traumatic events

Where should PFA first be used?

- General pop. shelters
- Special needs shelters
- Field hospitals & triage areas
- Acute care facilities
- Staging areas
- EOC
- Crisis hotlines
- Feeding locations
- Homes
- Businesses
- Any other community setting

At Risk Populations

- Children
- Older adults
- People with serious mental illness, physical disability, or other illness
- Families of people who died in disaster
- Professionals or volunteers participating in disaster response efforts
- Others

Basic Objectives of PFA

- Establish a human connection in a non-intrusive, compassionate manner
- Enhance immediate and ongoing safety, and provide physical and emotional comfort
- Calm and orient emotionally-overwhelmed or distraught survivors

Basic Objectives of PFA cont'd

- Help survivors to express immediate needs and concerns, and gather additional information as appropriate
- Offer practical assistance and information to help survivors address their immediate needs and concerns
- Connect survivors as soon as possible to social support networks, including family members, friends, neighbors, and community helping resources

Basic Objectives of PFA cont'd

- Support positive coping, acknowledge coping efforts and strengths, and empower survivors; encourage adults, children, and families to take an active role in their recovery
- Provide information that may help survivors to cope effectively with the psychological impact of disasters

Basic Objectives of PFA cont'd

- Facilitate continuity in disaster response efforts by clarifying how long the Psychological First Aid provider will be available, and (when appropriate) linking the survivor to another member of a disaster response team or to indigenous recovery systems, mental health services, public-sector services, and organizations

Delivering PFA

- Professional behavior
 - Be calm, courteous, organized, & helpful
 - Be visible & available
 - Maintain confidentiality as appropriate
 - Remain within the scope of your expertise & designated role

Delivering PFA

- Professional behavior
 - Make appropriate referrals when additional expertise is needed or requested by the individual
 - Be knowledgeable and sensitive to issues of culture and diversity
 - Pay attention to your own emotional and physical reactions, and actively manage these reactions

Guidelines for Delivering PFA

- Politely observe first, don't intrude. Then ask simple respectful questions, so as to be able to discuss how you may be of help
- Initiate contact only after you have observed the situation and the person or family, and have determined that contact is not likely to be an intrusion or disruptive

Guidelines for Delivering PFA

- Be prepared to be either avoided or flooded with contact by affected persons, and make brief but respectful contact with each person who approaches you
- Speak calmly. Be patient, responsive, and sensitive

Guidelines for Delivering PFA

- Speak in simple, concrete terms; don't use acronyms or responder 'jargon'. If necessary, speak slowly
- If survivors want to talk, be prepared to listen. When you listen, focus on learning what they want to tell you and how you can be of help

Guidelines for Delivering PFA

- Acknowledge the positive features of what the person has done to keep safe and reach the current setting
- Adapt the information you provide to directly address the person's immediate goals and clarify answers repeatedly as needed

Guidelines for Delivering PFA

- Give information that is accurate and age-appropriate for your audience, and correct inaccurate beliefs. If you don't know, tell them this and offer to find out
- When communicating through a translator or interpreter, look at and talk to the person you are addressing, not at the translator or interpreter

Guidelines for Delivering PFA

- Remember that the goal of Psychological First Aid is to reduce distress, assist with current needs, and promote adaptive functioning, not to elicit details of traumatic experiences and losses

PFA Core Actions

- Contact & engagement
- Safety & comfort
- Stabilization (if needed)
- Information gathering: current needs & concerns
- Practical assistance
- Connection with social supports
- Information on coping
- Linkage with collaborative services

Reactions to Traumatic Stress

- Cognitive
- Emotional
- Behavioral
- Physical

Cognitive Reactions

- Recurring dreams, nightmares, or thoughts about the event
- Difficulty concentrating or remembering
- Questioning one's spiritual or religious beliefs

Emotional Reactions

- Feeling frightened or anxious when reminded of event
- Feeling numb, withdrawn, empty, or depressed
- Feeling bursts of anger or intense irritability

Behavioral Reactions

- Avoiding activities or places that bring back memories of the event
- Isolating oneself from or having increased conflict with others
- Startling easily, being tearful for no apparent reason & having trouble sleeping

Physical Reactions

- Upset stomach, nausea, diarrhea
- Elevated heart rate, blood pressure, or blood sugar
- Fatigue/insomnia
- Weight gain/loss

Factors influencing intensity of reactions

- Threat to life
- Severe physical harm or injury
- Suffering intentional injury or harm
- Exposure to images of the grotesque
- Violent or sudden loss of a loved one
- Witnessing or learning of violence toward a loved one
- Exposure/fear of exposure to a noxious agent
- Intentional death or harm caused by others
- Large number of deaths, especially deaths of children

Reactions that may indicate need for medical or mental health help

- Disorientation
- Inability to care for oneself
- Inability to manage the activities of daily living
- Persistent flashbacks that do not diminish
- Suicidal or homicidal thoughts
- Drug/alcohol abuse
- Domestic violence, child abuse, elder abuse
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Activities to help community recover

- Provide memorials & opportunities to grieve
- Celebrate heroes & acknowledge victims
- Recognize anniversaries
- Create opportunities for those who suffered badly or continue to suffer
- Take effective post-crisis actions, including improving local preparedness

Questions or Comments?



Resources

- Psychological First Aid: Field Operations Guide (MRC version)
www.medicalreservecorps.gov/File/MRC_Resources/MRC_PFA.doc
- Preparing MRC Units for the Mental Health Impact of Disaster.
www.medicalreservecorps.gov/2007NLC/PDF/April19/Waterplace%20Ballroom%20II&III/MRC_NLC_Herrmann_Beutler_Presentation.pdf
- Public Health Management of Disasters: The Practice Guide. 2nd Ed. Landesman, L.Y. Copyright 2005.

Thank you

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