












Psychological First Aid
Just-in-Time Review 
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Learning Objectives






- Identify the basic objectives and intervention strategies of Psychological First Aid (PFA).
- Gain skills needed to implement the intervention strategies of PFA
- Assess and offer specified interventions within diverse impacted populations
- Be prepared to use PFA skills in practice sessions this afternoon

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Psychological First Aid Developed By:

- National Child Traumatic Stress Network
– www.NCTSN.org
- National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder
– www.ncptsd.va.gov

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Psychological First Aid Authors

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- Ann Jacobs, Ph.D.
- Christopher Layne, Ph.D.
- Robert Pynoos, M.D., MPH
- Josef Ruzek, Ph.D.
- Alan Steinberg, Ph.D.
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Medical Reserve Corps Adaptation

- Abbe Finn, Ph.D.
- Jack Herrmann, M.S.Ed.
- John Hickey, Ph.D.
- Edward Kantor, M.D.
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- James Shultz, Ph.D.

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Five Empirically-Supported Early Intervention Principles

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What is Psychological First Aid?

- PFA is:

An evidence-informed modular approach designed to assist children, adolescents, adults, and families in the immediate aftermath of disaster and terrorism.



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PFA IS:

- Individualized Guided Conversation
- Strengths-Focused
- Culturally Informed
- Developmentally Sensitive
- Non-Confrontational
- Applied in non-clinical settings



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PFA Is NOT

- Clinical interviewing or diagnosing
- A substitute for Crisis Intervention
- A style of therapy
- Guided by or focused on pathology
- The same for every survivor



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Psychological First Aid Core Actions

1	Contact and Engagement
2	Safety and Comfort
3	Stabilization
4	Information Gathering
5	Practical Assistance
6	Connection with Social Supports
7	Information on Coping
8	Linkage with Collaborative Services












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Core Action #1: Contact and Engagement

- Establish a connection with survivors in a non-intrusive and compassionate manner
 - Introduce yourself and describe your role
 - Ask for permission to talk
 - Explain objectives
 - Ask about immediate needs



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Core Action #1: Contact and Engagement

Personal Contact

- Personal contact varies from person to person and across cultural groups
- If you are not familiar with the survivor, **do not**:
 - Approach too closely
 - Make prolonged eye contact
 - Touch

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Core Action #1: Contact and Engagement

Personal Contact (cont.)

- Get guidance about cultural norms
- Seek cues from the survivor regarding “personal space”
- When working with families, identify the family spokesperson

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Core Action #2: Safety and Comfort

- The goal is to enhance immediate and ongoing safety and provide physical and emotional comfort



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Core Action #2: Safety and Comfort

Safety and Comfort

- Reassure about immediate physical safety
- Provide **CONSISTENT** information about disaster response activities and/or services
- Offer physical comforts
- Offer social comforts and link to other survivors
- Discuss media viewing
- Avoid engaging in gossip, politicizing or arm-chair analysis of the event
- Affirmation of skills already being used

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Core Action #2: Safety and Comfort

Acutely Bereaved Individuals

- Listen carefully with sympathy
- Be informed about cultural norms
- Know that grief reactions vary from person to person
- Help family members to respect differences in grieving

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Core Action #2: Safety and Comfort

Grief and Spiritual Issues

- Ask survivors if they have religious/spiritual needs
- Refer them to a clergy member of their choice
- Do not judge, contradict, or correct what they say about their religious beliefs
- If survivors want to pray, help them find a suitable place

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Core Action #3: Stabilization

- The goal is to calm and orient emotionally-overwhelmed and distraught survivors



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Core Action #3: Stabilization

Signs a Person May Need Stabilization

- Glassy eyed and vacant
- Unresponsive
- Disoriented
- Exhibiting strong emotional responses
- Uncontrollable physical reactions
- Frantic searching behavior

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Core Action #3: Stabilization

Steps toward Stabilization (cont.)

- Offer support and help him/her focus on specific manageable feelings, thoughts, and goals
- Enlist support from family/friends
- Speak directly to his/her immediate concern or difficulty
- Give information that orients him/her to the surroundings

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Core Action #3: Stabilization

Grounding

- Ask the person to:
 - Listen to and look at you
 - Orient him/herself to the surroundings
 - Talk about the aspect of the situation that is under control, hopeful, or positive
 - Breathe in and out slowly and deeply
 - Name five **non-distressing** things he/she can see, hear, and feel

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Core Action #3: Stabilization

Grounding (cont.)

- Younger children may find it easier to identify colors that they see around them
- Get a medical consult when the situation is secure
- Engage in breathing or grounding activity WITH the survivor and prompt them to join you

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Core Action #4: Information Gathering

- The goal is to identify immediate needs and concerns, gather additional information, and tailor PFA interventions
- It is used to determine:
 - Need for immediate referral
 - Need for any additional available ancillary services
 - Which components of PFA may be helpful

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Core Action #4: Information Gathering

Example of Content Areas

- Nature and severity of experiences
- Death of a loved one
- Concerns about the post-disaster circumstances and threat
- Separation from or concerns about the safety of loved ones
- Physical illness, mental health conditions, and need for medications
- Losses incurred as a result of the disaster

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Core Action #4: Information Gathering

Clarifying Disaster-Related Experiences

- Avoid asking for in-depth description of traumatic experiences
- Follow the lead of the survivor in discussing the event
- Individuals should **not** be pressed to disclose details of any trauma or loss

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Core Action #5: Practical Assistance



- Offer practical help to survivors in addressing immediate needs and concerns
 - Identify the most immediate need
 - Clarify the need
 - Discuss an action response
 - Act to address the need
 - Help set ACHIEVABLE goals









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Core Action #6: Connection with Social Support

Connection with Social Support (cont.)

- Enhance access to primary support persons (family and significant others)
- Encourage use of immediately available support persons
- Discuss ways to seek and give support
 - Identify possible support persons
 - Discuss what to do/talk about
 - Explore reluctance to seek support
- Address extreme social isolation or withdrawal












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Core Action #7: Information on Coping

- Provide information about stress reactions and coping to reduce distress and promote adaptive functioning
 - Explain what is currently known about the event
 - Inform survivors of available resources
 - Identify the post-disaster reactions and how to manage them
 - Promote and affirm self-care and family care practices already happening












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Core Action #7: Information on Coping

Stress Reactions and Coping

- Provide simple information about stress reactions and coping:
 - Build discussion around their individual reactions
 - Include possible negative and positive reactions
 - NORMALIZE responses
 - Discuss negative and positive coping actions

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Core Action #7: Information on Coping

Duration of Reactions

- How long the reactions last will depend on (among other things):
 - The severity of trauma exposure and loss
 - The severity of post-trauma adversities
 - How often they are experiencing reminders
 - “A few days to a month or so; but reactions can also come and go”
 - Reactions that are causing significant impairment or last longer than a month should be discussed with PCP

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Core Action #7: Information on Coping

Helping with Reminders

- Discuss the potential impact of trauma, loss, and change reminders
- Identify current and potential reminders
- Identify ways of coping with reminders

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Core Action #8: Linkage with Collaborative Services

- The goal is to link survivors with available services needed immediately or in the future



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Core Action #8: Linkage with Collaborative Services

Agencies Providing Services

- Reconnect survivors to agencies that provided them services before the disaster:
 - Mental health services
 - Medical services
 - Spiritual support
 - Maine 211
 - Crisis Hotline 988
 - Schools
 - Drug and alcohol support groups

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Provider Care: Management

- Mandated rotation where workers are moved from the most highly exposed assignments to varied levels of exposure
- Enforced support by providing/encouraging:
 - Regular supervision
 - Regular case conferences
 - Peer partners and peer consultation

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Provider Care: Personal

- Limit daily numbers of most severe cases
- Utilize the buddy system to share distressing emotional responses
- Use benefit time, vacation, personal time
- Access supervision routinely
- Practice stress management during the workday
- Stay aware of limitations and needs



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Provider Care: Following Disaster Response

- Expect a readjustment period upon returning home
- Discuss the situation with coworkers and management
- Participate in formal help if extreme stress persists
- Ask help in parenting, if you feel irritable or have difficulties adjusting



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Take Home Messages

- Utilize a flexible, pragmatic, approach, specific to the need, context, and phase of recovery
- Refer to the Field Operations Guide for detailed information and handouts
- Take care of yourself and your colleagues
- Document progress to move the field forward



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