Psychological First Aid For All

Supporting People in the Aftermath of Crisis Events

World Mental Health Day 2016
World Mental Health Day 2016

• World Mental Health Day is an annual event which aims to:
  1. Raise awareness of mental health issues across the globe
  2. Mobilize efforts in support of mental health

• Mental health problems are an extremely important issue worldwide due to their impact on the human rights and quality of life of those affected and their families

• This year’s theme: **Psychological First Aid (PFA)**
Psychological First Aid: Guide for Field Workers

- WHO publication
- Developed in collaborative effort between WHO and NGOs
- Endorsed by 24 UN/NGO international agencies
- Available in numerous languages
Outline

• Psychological First Aid (PFA):
  – First-line psychosocial support after a crisis event
• What PFA is and is not?
• Who, when and where of PFA
• How to help responsibly
• Action principles: Look ~ Listen ~ Link
• Things to say and do
• Supporting those who likely need special attention
• Self-care and team-care for helpers
• PFA capacity building for disaster preparedness and response
• PFA resources (translations, adaptations, online forums)
Crisis Events

• Crisis events – both large-scale and individual – occur in every community in the world
  – Large-scale events include natural disasters, war and terrorist attacks, disease outbreaks, large-scale displacement of people and communities
  – Individual events affect one or a few people, such as accidents, robbery, assault

• They have physical, social and emotional consequences for those affected
PFA: First-Line Psychosocial Support

• PFA is important, first-line psychosocial support for people affected by crisis events
  – PFA, like medical “first aid”, is not enough on its own

• Immediately after a crisis event, those who assist are often family members, neighbors, teachers, community members and first responders of various kinds (emergency medical teams, police, firefighters)

• Term “PFA” was first coined in the 1940s but its use has increased in modern-day crisis events
Examples of people who are learning PFA

- Europe: psychosocial support staff of local agencies
- Suriname and Latin America: police, firemen, nurses
- Iraq: UNHCR protection officers
- West Bank/Gaza: family members, humanitarian aid staff
- Sudan: psychiatrists, psychologists, emergency staff
- Sri Lanka: NGO and government staff, local villagers
- International Organization for Migration MHPSS in Emergencies course: humanitarian aid workers
- UN/NGO managers of humanitarian aid agencies to support their own staff
- Japan: national defense force, police, embassy staff
- West Africa: medical personnel, Ebola burial teams, families
- Central/eastern Europe: international school counselors
What is PFA?

Humane, supportive & practical assistance to fellow human beings who recently suffered a serious stressor:

• Non-intrusive, practical care and support
• Assessing needs and concerns
• Helping people to address basic needs (food, water)
• Listening, but not pressuring people to talk
• Comforting people and helping them to feel calm
• Helping people connect to information, services and social supports
• Protecting people from further harm
What PFA is NOT?

- NOT something only professionals can do
- NOT professional counselling
- NOT a clinical or psychiatric intervention (although can be part of good clinical care)
- NOT “psychological debriefing”
- NOT asking people to analyze what happened or put time and events in order
- NOT pressuring people to tell you their story, or asking details about how they feel or what happened
Why PFA?

• People do better over the long term if they...
  – Feel safe, connected to others, calm & hopeful
  – Have access to social, physical & emotional support
  – Regain a sense of control by being able to help themselves
PFA: Who, When, Where?

• **Who** can benefit from PFA?
  – Boys, girls, women and men who have recently experienced a crisis event and are distressed
  – Some people need more than PFA alone such as people with life-threatening injuries or unable to care for themselves or their children

• **When** should PFA be provided?
  – When encountering a person in distress, usually immediately following a crisis event

• **Where** should PFA be provided?
  – Anywhere that is safe for the helper and affected person, ideally with some privacy as appropriate to the situation
How to Help Responsibly

• Adapt what you do to take account of the person’s culture

• Respect safety, dignity and rights
  – **Safety**: don’t expose people to further harm, ensure (as best you can) they are safe and protected from further physical or psychological harm
  – **Dignity**: treat people with respect and according to their cultural and social norms
  – **Rights**: act only in people’s best interest, ensure access to impartial assistance without discrimination, assist people to claim their rights and access available support

• Be aware of other emergency response measures

• Care for caregivers: practice self-care and team-care
Helping Responsibly: Ethical Guidelines

**Do’s**
- Be honest and trustworthy.
- Respect a person’s right to make their own decisions.
- Be aware of and set aside your own biases and prejudices.
- Make it clear to people that even if they refuse help now, they can still access help in the future.
- Respect privacy and keep the person’s story confidential, as appropriate.
- Behave appropriately according to the person’s culture, age and gender.

**Don’ts**
- Don’t exploit your relationship as a helper.
- Don’t ask the person for any money or favor for helping them.
- Don’t make false promises or give false information.
- Don’t exaggerate your skills.
- Don’t force help on people, and don’t be intrusive or pushy.
- Don’t pressure people to tell you their story.
- Don’t share the person’s story with others.
- Don’t judge the person for their actions or feelings.
PFA Action Principles

Prepare

Look

Listen

Link
# PFA Action Principles

| Prepare | • Learn about the crisis event.  
|• Learn about available services and supports.  
|• Learn about safety and security concerns. |
|---|---|
| Look | • Observe for safety.  
|• Observe for people with obvious urgent basic needs.  
|• Observe for people with serious distress reactions. |
| Listen | • Make contact with people who may need support.  
|• Ask about people’s needs and concerns.  
|• Listen to people and help them feel calm. |
| Link | • Help people address basic needs and access services.  
|• Help people cope with problems.  
|• Give information.  
|• Connect people with loved ones and social support. |
Good Communication: Things to Say and Do

- Try to find a quiet place to talk and minimize outside distractions.
- Stay near the person but keep an appropriate distance depending on their age, gender and culture.
- Let them know you hear what they are saying, for example, nod your head and stay attentive.
- Be patient and calm.
- Provide factual information IF you have it. Be honest about what you know and what you 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 share with you, such as loss of home or death of a loved one. “I’m so sorry…”
- Respect privacy. Keep the person’s story confidential, especially when they disclose very private events.
- Acknowledge the person’s strengths and how they have helped themselves.

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Good Communication: Things **NOT** to Say and Do

- Don’t pressure someone to tell their story.
- Don’t interrupt or rush someone’s story.
- Don’t give your opinions of the person’s situation, just listen.
- 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 too technical terms.
- 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 feel you have to try to 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.
People who Likely Need Special Attention
(to be safe, to access services)

• Children and adolescents
  – Especially those separated from caregivers

• People with health conditions and disabilities
  – People who are non-mobile, or who have chronic illness, hearing/visual impairments (deaf or blind), or severe mental disorders
  – Frail elderly people, pregnant or nursing women

• People at risk of discrimination or violence
  – Women, people of certain ethnic or religious groups, people with mental disabilities
Practice self-care and team-care

• Before:
  – Are you ready to help?
  – Are you connected with a group or organization for safety and coordination?

• During:
  – How can you stay physically and emotionally healthy?
  – How can you know your limits?
  – How can you and your colleagues support one another?

• After:
  – How can you take time to rest, recover and reflect?
PFA Capacity Building: Disaster Preparedness & Response

- PFA orientation has been conducted in nearly all parts of the world with various types of people
- Standard practice for many humanitarian agencies
Adaptations and resources in local languages

- 20 translations available on the WHO website:
  - Arabic, Chinese, Dutch, English, Farsi, French, German, Greek, Japanese, Kiswahili, Korean, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Sinhala, Slovenian, Spanish, Tamil, Turkish, Urdu
- PFA guide and facilitation manual adapted for the Ebola virus disease outbreak
PFA Facilitation Guide

- PFA facilitation guide and slide set are available on WHO website
- Half- and full-day agendas
  - Checklist for organizers
  - Step-by-step orientation
  - Slides and handouts
- Learning activities relevant to different cultures and countries around the world
Online Resources

- PFA helpers can join a global network of practitioners in an online learning forum on [http://mhpss.net](http://mhpss.net)
- Find the latest PFA resources and trainings
- Share knowledge and experience from different regions and crisis events
Dignity in Mental Health: PFA for All

• PFA can be provided by professionals and non-professionals alike
• Everyone should have access to PFA following a crisis event, as part of the spectrum of mental health and psychosocial support
• PFA is widely used for disaster preparedness and response by governments, UN and NGOs
• Resources are freely available and adapted to local languages and contexts: http://www.who.int/mental_health/publications/guide_field_workers/en/