



# Psychological First Aid

## Employers and Supervisors

- Encourage employees to engage in physical activities and to combine these activities with useful tasks.

### Take care of yourself

- Get enough rest and eat healthy foods.
- Pay attention to your own stress responses.
- Seek out family and friends for support.
- Try exercising or other physical activity to relieve stress.
- Engage in helpful, productive activities that are satisfying and useful in the situation.
- Follow the advice you would give others.
- Manage your own reaction when faced with emotional outbursts from others by:
  - ▶ Remaining quiet and calm.
  - ▶ Avoiding the temptation to engage in a shouting match.
  - ▶ Acknowledging the person's point of view.
  - ▶ Disengaging and respectfully walking away from the person if you are being insulted or threatened.
  - ▶ Contacting law enforcement personnel if you feel that you are in danger.

For more information about Emergency Preparedness and Psychological First Aid Psychological First Aid, refer to [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov) and [www.ncptsd.org](http://www.ncptsd.org).



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### When Disaster Strikes

It's the middle of the day. Your meeting is disrupted when you hear the fire alarm. From your location, you cannot tell what is happening. Some co-workers are ignoring the alarm; others are trying to find out what is happening.

Then, you hear an explosion somewhere within the complex. Security is clearing your building and you are running to the nearest exit. Outside it's cold and dreary. The sky is dark from the billowing smoke.



Jocelyn Augustino/FEMA Photo

You think about the people you know who may be trapped and notice the distressed looks and tear-filled faces of your co-workers. You feel you must do something useful. But what can you do?



Andrea Booher/FEMA Photo

### Psychological First Aid in the Work Environment

You can provide comfort care and assistance to co-workers and their family members by using Psychological First Aid (PFA).

PFA is a way to give emotional support and help to people of any age, ethnic and cultural heritage, and social and economic background in the immediate aftermath of disaster.

You know that the scene before you is only the beginning. The immediate effects of this tragedy will be felt by employees for weeks. The loss of co-workers, reductions in productivity, and difficulty managing and paying the workforce will critically affect your company.

# PFA in Practice



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You can use PFA to meet the basic needs of people in stressful situations, no matter what the differences are among them. PFA will provide you with basic strategies to help people cope with their pressing concerns and needs in the days and weeks after the disaster.

## Reach out to those who need help and provide comfort care.

- Make certain that co-workers are safe and out of harm's way.
- Offer immediate assistance to distressed individuals by looking for ways to keep them comfortable (e.g., providing blankets and water or directing them to a place to sit).
- Let your co-workers know you are concerned about them and describe how you may be able to help.
- Make eye contact and determine the person's comfort level with you as a helper. Be aware that some people are not comfortable asking for help.
- Speak slowly and clearly, and allow the person to speak without interruption.
- Protect the person's privacy by keeping your conversation from being overheard.
- Avoid making promises you will not be able to keep.

## Recognize basic needs and support problem-solving.

- Determine and coordinate activities that will keep co-workers engaged and helpful to others.
- Be patient with staff, and be prepared to explain things more than once.
- Recognize and attend to co-workers' pre-existing physical conditions by offering medical assistance, if necessary.
- Help employees retrieve personal items, when appropriate, from their offices that are essential (e.g., cell

phones, car and house keys, wallets, medication, and other personal items).

- Help your co-workers contact their family members and make provisions for childcare.
- Identify what an individual's specific needs are and help him or her develop a plan of action.
- Be specific and concrete, and focus on one task at a time.
- Secure transportation for co-workers to get to and from work, if necessary.
- Direct co-workers and family members to people who can help them solve problems resulting from the crisis.

## Validate feelings and thoughts.

- Listen and hear what your co-workers have to say by being fully present and attentive.
- Allow them to talk as little or as much as they care to. Try not to push too hard to get them to talk about what happened or how they are feeling.
- Avoid the temptation to judge the rightness or wrongness of your co-workers' reactions.

## Provide accurate and timely information.

- Provide accurate information in response to co-workers' questions as soon as you can.
- Treat all questions seriously and offer truthful answers.

- Avoid the temptation to ignore questions that seem unimportant.

## Connect co-workers with support systems.

- Reunite co-workers with family members.
- Recognize that employees may wish to connect with spiritual leaders and practitioners and may solicit your help to facilitate this activity.
- Contact medical professionals who can help assess co-workers' physical conditions and medication needs.
- Seek help from mental health professionals, especially if your co-workers exhibit risky or dangerous behaviors or request to see a counselor.

## Provide education about stress responses.

- Help employees and their family members to understand the stress they may be experiencing in response to the situation will lessen with time.
- Encourage individuals to seek help from a physician or mental health professional.
- Exercise caution that you don't minimize an individual's reactions.

## Reinforce strengths and positive coping strategies.

- Encourage employees to get back to their routine activities as soon as practical.
- Suggest that individuals choose healthy foods and minimize the amount of junk food they eat.



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