



# Psychological First Aid

## 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, refer to [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov), [www.ncpsd.org](http://www.ncpsd.org), and [www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org).



Robert Kaufmann/FEMA Photo

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## Teachers and Educators

### When Disaster Strikes

School violence and natural disasters happen in other teachers' schools. You just can't see it happening in your school or on your campus. Then the day comes and you find yourself in the middle of a crisis.

One minute it's a typical day. The next you're trying to move students and others to a safe location.

Students are depending on you, and you feel the responsibility in a way you never could have imagined. Every second counts. You speak words of encouragement to keep students and colleagues calm. The danger has finally passed.

Your school has been transformed; it's nothing you recognize. You orient yourself; lead your group away from the building. It's then you realize some are injured, some of the students and your colleagues are stunned into a strange silence, and some are shaking and crying.

Parents are arriving on the scene and frantically looking for their children, and children are searching for their parents, siblings, and friends.

Spouses of school faculty and staff members are also trying to locate their loved ones.

The situation is heart wrenching and you feel you must help. What can you do in the minutes, hours, and days following such a tragedy?

### Psychological First Aid in Your School

In the face of such a tragedy, you can offer comfort care and assistance to those around you by using Psychological First Aid (PFA). Think about the diversity before you with so many people from varying life circumstances all faced with the consequences of the disaster they share in common.

Mark Wolfe/FEMA Photo



# PFA in Practice



Mark Wolfe/FEMA Photo

PFA is a way to give emotional support and help to people of any age or background in the immediate aftermath of disaster.

You know from day-to-day teaching experiences that each person has unique characteristics. Despite this, 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 strategies to help people cope with their pressing concerns and needs in the days and weeks after the disaster.



Andrea Booher/FEMA Photo

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

- Make certain that individuals 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 individuals 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.
- Stay close to your students; make sure they can see you or another adult who is in charge at all times.

## Recognize basic needs and support problem-solving.

- Be patient with students, parents, and colleagues, and be prepared to explain things more than once.
- Assume a position at eye level when you address younger students, and use words they can understand.
- Arrange activities that will keep students engaged and distracted, if necessary.

- Recognize and attend to your students' and colleagues' existing medical conditions.
- Help your students locate their parents, guardians, siblings, or friends as soon as the situation allows it.
- Follow emergency and security protocols before releasing students to their parents.
- Help your colleagues connect with their family members.

## Validate feelings and thoughts.

- Listen and hear what your students and colleagues 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 their reactions.

## Provide accurate and timely information.

- Provide accurate information in response to questions as soon as you can.
- Treat all questions seriously and offer truthful answers.
- Avoid the temptation to ignore questions that seem unimportant.
- Gauge the amount of information students can process; wait until they ask a question before providing details of the situation.

## Connect children with support systems.

- Reunite students with family members, including siblings attending the same school, parents, guardians, and friends.
- Contact medical professionals who can help with physical conditions and medication needs.
- Seek help from mental health professionals, especially if your students or co-workers exhibit risky or dangerous behaviors or request to see a counselor.

## Provide education about stress responses.

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

## Reinforce strengths and positive coping strategies.

- Encourage parents, students, and co-workers to get back to routine activities as soon as practical.
- Suggest that individuals choose healthy foods and minimize the amount of junk food they eat.
- Encourage parents, students, and co-workers to engage in physical activities and to combine these activities with useful tasks.