

Tips for Psychological First Aid

What Is Psychological First Aid?

Psychological First Aid (PFA) is an evidence-informed approach to assist students, staff, and families in the immediate aftermath of witnessing, experiencing, or responding to a disaster or emergency event. It involves listening to, protecting, and connecting with individuals as they return to their usual school-based activities after an event. Studies suggest that PFA helps reduce the initial distress caused by emergencies.

Who Can Use PFA in the School Setting?

Any trained staff member or school administrator can use PFA.



Sample PFA Scripts

HELPFUL

- “Hello. My name is _____. I’m here to try to help. Is there anything you need right now?”
- “It’s very normal to feel _____ in this type of situation.”
- “You are not the only student feeling this way at this time; we will all get through this together.”
- “Do you need a bottle of water, a granola bar, or a restroom?”


AVOID

- “Just get over it.”
- “You’re overreacting; calm down.”

7 Steps To Create a PFA Culture


- 1 Listen to staff and students:** Provide opportunities for sharing concerns and feelings.
- 2 Protect the school culture and community:** Free the school environment of unnecessary reminders of the event and limit unnecessary changes to routines.
- 3 Connect policy and practice:** Incorporate healing-centered resilience practices into school policies and procedures.
- 4 Connect with community partners:** Provide mental/behavioral resources that support a healthy school environment.
- 5 Train administrators and teachers to lead by example:** Model healing-centered verbal and nonverbal cues.
- 6 Train administrators and teachers to recognize signs of staff and student distress:** Remind them that reactions to emergencies can vary. Different healing approaches may/may not support all individuals.
- 7 Avoid patronizing, pathologizing, or making assumptions about the person in distress:** Provide caring and respectful support at the level of the person’s need. When in doubt, ask.



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NOTE: PFA is a strategy for reducing initial distress. It does not replace professional mental health treatment. Individuals demonstrating continued difficulties should seek additional support in the days and weeks following an event.