



# Psychological First Aid

- Encourage individuals 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 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) and [www.ncptsd.org](http://www.ncptsd.org).



Andrea Booher/FEMA Photo

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## Healthcare Professionals

### When Disaster Strikes

Influenza is reaching epidemic proportions throughout your county. The local public health director has declared a health emergency, placing all hospitals, clinics, and medical providers on high alert. With the national concern and publicity about influenza, you know that your healthcare facility will be overwhelmed with people, some with actual flu symptoms and many who are worried that they have been exposed to the flu.

Individuals who are sick will be encouraged to stay home from work and social activities. Parents will stay home to care for their children or older family members who are sick. Many doctors, nurses, and healthcare staff will be exposed to the sick and dying and may get sick themselves. Staffing levels will be reduced; resources will be stretched; stress levels will be high. You know that it will take more than medical expertise to maintain an effective and organized environment and to perform essential job tasks.

### Psychological First Aid in Healthcare Settings

Your background and training tell you that in times of crisis it is imperative to keep people calm and to provide support to co-workers, patients, and family members who are experiencing high levels of stress and uncertainty.

People may find themselves overwhelmed by the magnitude and complexity of issues and problems they must face in trying to work, care for family members, understand the treatment options available to them, and get effective medical services, all within a healthcare system that is overwhelmed by the demand placed upon it by the influenza epidemic.

Petty Officer Second Class Paul Roszkowski/U.S. Coast Guard Photo



# PFA in Practice

Psychological First Aid (PFA) can play an important role in helping people cope with stressful situations. 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 or in the midst of a public health emergency. Since situations like this make no discriminations among victims, you can expect people from all ages and life circumstances to experience stress responses that will test your patience and fortitude.

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 and throughout the public health emergency.

Mark Wolfe/FEMA Photo



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

- 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.
- Make certain that you, your co-workers, and patients understand and practice the facility's hygiene and infection control procedures.
- 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).
- Provide an interpreter or translator when necessary and be sensitive to cultural and ethnic needs.

## **Recognize basic needs and support problem-solving.**

- Determine and coordinate activities that will keep co-workers engaged and helpful to each other.
- Be tolerant and patient. You may need to explain things more than once.

- Help your co-workers contact their family members and childcare providers.
- Assist them in finding resources to care for their pets.
- Help individuals get transportation to and from the hospital.
- Facilitate information sharing between healthcare providers and families of patients.
- 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.

## **Validate feelings and thoughts.**

- Listen and hear what individuals have to say about the current situation 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 to you.

- Connect individuals with the resources that can provide the answers to their questions.

## **Connect individuals with support systems.**

- Encourage co-workers to stay connected with their family members.
- Help families to provide support and care for loved ones who are hospitalized.
- Facilitate spiritual practices by connecting patients, co-workers and their family members with spiritual leaders and practitioners.
- Seek help from mental health professionals, especially if individuals exhibit risky or dangerous behaviors or request to see a counselor.

## **Provide education about stress responses.**

- Help patients, co-workers, 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 family physician or mental health professional.
- Exercise caution that you don't minimize a person's reactions.

## **Reinforce strengths and positive coping strategies.**

- Encourage patients, co-workers, and their family members 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.