

Psychological First Aid in Schools

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network and the National Center for PTSD have made the Psychological First Aid for Schools Field Operations Guide* and accompanying handouts available online <http://www.nctsn.org/content/psychological-first-aid-schoolspfa>

Psychological First Aid for Schools is an evidence-informed approach for assisting children, adolescents, adults, and families in the aftermath of a school crisis, disaster, or terrorism event.

The guide is divided into the following sections:

Introduction and Overview

Preparing to Deliver Psychological First Aid

The Core Actions

- Contact and Engagement
- Safety and Comfort
- Stabilization
- Information Gathering: Current Needs and Concerns
- Practical Assistance
- Connection with Social Supports
- Information on Coping
- Linkage with Collaborative Services

Appendices

As stated in the manual:

“The basic objectives of a Psychological First Aid provider in schools are:

- To establish a positive connection with students and staff members in a non-intrusive, compassionate manner
- To enhance immediate and ongoing safety and provide physical and emotional comfort
- To calm and orient emotionally overwhelmed or distraught students and staff
- To help students and staff members identify their immediate needs and concerns
- To offer practical assistance and information to help students and staff members address their immediate needs and concerns
- To connect students and staff members as soon as possible to social support networks, including family members, friends, coaches, and other school or community groups
- To empower students, staff, and families to take an active role in their recovery, by acknowledging their coping efforts and strengths, and supporting adaptive coping
- To make clear your availability and (when appropriate) link the student and staff to other relevant school or community resources such as school counseling services, peer support programs, afterschool activities, tutoring, primary care physicians, local recovery systems, mental health services, employee assistance programs, public-sector services, and other relief organizations

Core actions are:

1. Contact and Engagement
Goal: To initiate contacts or to respond to contacts by students and staff in a non-intrusive, compassionate, and helpful manner
2. Safety and Comfort
Goal: To enhance immediate and ongoing safety, and provide physical and emotional comfort
3. Stabilization (if needed)
Goal: To calm and orient emotionally overwhelmed or disoriented students and staff
4. Information Gathering: (Current Needs and Concerns)
Goal: To identify immediate needs and concerns, gather additional information, and tailor Psychological First Aid for Schools interventions to meet these needs
5. Practical Assistance
Goal: To offer practical help to students and staff in addressing immediate needs and concerns
6. Connection with Social Supports
Goal: To help establish brief or ongoing contacts with primary support persons or other sources of support, including family, friends, teachers, and other school and/or community resources
7. Information on Coping
Goal: To provide information about stress reactions and coping to reduce distress and promote adaptive functioning
8. Linkage with Collaborative Services
Goal: To link students and staff with available services needed at the time or in the future

These core actions of Psychological First Aid for Schools constitute the basic objectives of providing early assistance within hours, days, or weeks following an event.”

The manual stresses the importance of being flexible and devoting the amount of time spent on each core action based on the person’s specific needs and concerns.

*Brymer M., Taylor M., Escudero P., Jacobs A., Kronenberg M., Macy R., Mock L., Payne L., Pynoos R., & Vogel J. Psychological first aid for schools: Field operations guide, 2nd Edition. (2012). Los Angeles: National Child Traumatic Stress Network.

http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/pfa/school/1-PFA_for_Schools_final.pdf