Psychological First Aid: 
Responding to a Student in Crisis

Pynoos and Nader (1988)* discuss psychological first aid for use during and in the immediate aftermath of a crisis (providing a detailed outline of steps according to age). Their work helps all of us think about some general points about responding to a student who is emotionally upset.

Psychological first aid for students/staff/parents can be as important as medical aid. The immediate objective is to help individuals deal with the troubling psychological reactions.

(1) Managing the situation
A student who is upset can produce a form of emotional contagion.
To counter this, staff must
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(2) Mobilizing Support
The student needs support and guidance.
Ways in which staff can help are to
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(3) Following-up
Over the following days (sometimes longer), it is important to check on how things are progressing.
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Another form of “first aid” involves helping needy students and families connect with emergency services. This includes connecting with agencies that can provide emergency food, clothing, housing, transportation, and so forth. Such basic needs constitute major crises for too many students and are fundamental barriers to learning and performing and even to getting to school.