

Psychological First Aid

How to support yourself and others after a frightening event.

Normal reactions to an abnormal event

Fear, shock, sadness, anger, guilt, numbness, trouble sleeping, nightmares, headaches and difficulty concentrating are common after a crisis. For most people they ease over days and weeks with safety, rest and support.

Helping someone: Look, Listen, Link

LOOK

- Check that the area is safe.
- Look for people with urgent needs: injured, very distressed, children alone, elderly, disabled.

LISTEN

- Introduce yourself. Ask what they need and what worries them.
- Listen calmly. Let them talk, or stay quiet with them.
- Help them feel calm: a quiet place, slow breathing, water, a blanket.

LINK

- Help them get basic needs: water, food, shelter, medical care.
- Help them contact loved ones.
- Give accurate information you know to be true. Connect them to services.

Do and don't

Do	Don't
Be honest and respectful	Force anyone to talk about what happened
Respect their choices and privacy	Make promises you cannot keep
Stay calm and patient	Judge their reactions or feelings
Keep children with their caregivers	Share their story without permission

Calming techniques

- Slow breathing: breathe in through the nose for 4 counts, out through the mouth for 6 counts. Repeat for 2 minutes.
- Grounding: name 5 things you can see, 4 you can touch, 3 you can hear, 2 you can smell, 1 you can taste.
- Keep small routines: meals, washing, prayer, a walk, time with others.

Supporting children

- Keep them close and keep daily routines as much as possible.
- Tell them the truth in simple words. Tell them they are safe with you and it is not their fault.

- Let them play, draw and ask questions. Younger children may cling, wet the bed or have tantrums. Be patient.
- Limit how much news and images of violence they see.

Look after yourself

Rest, eat, drink water, talk to people you trust, and take breaks from helping. Avoid alcohol and drugs to cope.

When to get professional help

DANGER If someone talks about wanting to die or hurt themselves or others, do not leave them alone. Get help immediately from a health worker, emergency service or trusted person.

Also get help if distress is so strong someone cannot care for themselves or their children, or if reactions do not ease after several weeks.

Local support service and phone _____

Local health / mental health service and phone _____



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Sources:

- WHO, War Trauma Foundation, World Vision: Psychological First Aid: Guide for Field Workers (2011)
- UNICEF: Talking to children about conflict and crisis

Important: General information only. Not a substitute for trained medical help or official instructions. Always follow local authorities and emergency services.

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