

# PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID



## Field Operations Guide

### Medical Reserve Corps National Child Traumatic Stress Network National Center for PTSD



# Acknowledgements

This Medical Reserve Corps Adaptation of the Psychological First Aid (PFA) Field Operations Guide is derived from the original PFA Guide developed by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network and the National Center for PTSD. Members of the National Medical Reserve Corps Mental Health Work Group, the National Child Traumatic Stress Network and the National Center for PTSD, as well as other individuals involved in coordinating and participating in disaster response, have contributed to the current document.

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# Psychological First Aid

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# INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

## PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID IN MEDICAL RESERVE CORPS SETTING

### The Medical Reserve Corps Edition of PFA

The Medical Reserve Corps (MRC), one of the newest organizations in the disaster response community, has evolved rapidly since its creation in 2002, by the Office of the Surgeon General, United States Public Health Service (USPHS). Now with more than 400 individual units and over 73,000 members, MRCs are rapidly becoming the most prominent vehicle for pre-registering, credentialing and training health and mental health professional volunteers in disaster response.

As the program evolved, it became clear that individual MRC units were seeking assistance in interpreting best practices and developing response guidelines across a host of operational areas. Taking this feedback, the national Program Director, Commander Rob Tosatto, USPHS, initiated several work groups to help identify some common guidelines and standard tools for MRC units to consider, while at the same time respecting the local autonomy of the individual unit. One of these areas of focus is disaster mental health.

The National MRC Mental Health Work Group has examined the field of disaster mental health and reviewed a host of issues with the intent of providing guidance to local MRC units on areas of core competence, the availability of existing training curricula, voids in service delivery and controversies in the field. As one of its first actions, the National MRC Mental Health Work Group is recommending ‘Psychological First Aid’ as a standard model of mental health intervention in early response to disasters and other traumatic events. We believe this Guide and direction helps to fill a major gap in the field by helping to standardize and clarify the concepts of ‘Psychological First Aid’, one of the few evidence-driven intervention strategies in disaster mental health response.

### What is Psychological First Aid?

Psychological First Aid is an evidence-informed<sup>1</sup> modular approach to assist children, adolescents, adults, and families in the immediate aftermath of disaster and terrorism.<sup>2</sup> Psychological First Aid is designed to reduce the initial distress caused by traumatic events, and to foster short- and long-term adaptive functioning and coping. Principles and techniques of Psychological First Aid meet four basic standards. They are: (1) consistent with research evidence on risk and resilience following trauma; (2) applicable and practical in field settings; (3) appropriate to developmental level across the lifespan; and (4) culturally informed and adaptable. Psychological First Aid does not presume all survivors will develop severe psychopathology, but instead fosters an understanding that disaster survivors, and others impacted by such events, will experience a broad range of reactions (e.g. physical, psychological, cognitive, spiritual). Some of these reactions will cause sufficient distress for the individual and may be alleviated by support from compassionate and caring disaster responders.

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<sup>1</sup> PFA has received considerable support from disaster mental health experts in the field as the ‘acute intervention of choice’ when responding to the psychological, psychosocial, and psychospiritual needs of individuals impacted by disaster. It is important to note, however, no model of PFA to date has been empirically validated or rigorously tested and thus, the efficacy of this supportive intervention and its resultant outcomes are unknown. Because many of the components of PFA have emanated from other theoretical models of support that have been tested and validated, there is consensus among experts at this time that these components when administered to disaster survivors and workers individually should, at worst produce no harm, and at best, provide effective ways for individuals to manage post-disaster stress and identify those who may require additional psychological support.

<sup>2</sup> While this guide primarily focuses on the use of PFA in a disaster survivor population, this support intervention may also be used with disaster workers and other relief personnel.

Psychological First Aid is an intervention strategy that can be woven into the basic disaster response mechanisms for MRC units.

## **Who is Psychological First Aid For?**

Psychological First Aid intervention strategies are intended for use with children, adolescents, parents/caretakers, families, and adults. Other populations include healthcare workers, law enforcement officers, firefighters, emergency medical service professionals, and other first responders and disaster relief workers.

## **Who Delivers Psychological First Aid?**

Psychological First Aid is designed for delivery by a variety of response units. All members of the MRC who provide acute assistance as part of the organized disaster response effort should be trained in the basics of providing PFA. These providers may be imbedded in a variety of response units, including first responder teams, incident command systems, primary and emergency health care providers, school crisis response teams, faith-based organizations, Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT), Medical Reserve Corps, the Citizens Corps, and disaster relief organizations.

## **When Should Psychological First Aid Be Used?**

PFA is a supportive behavioral intervention for use in the immediate aftermath of disasters and other traumatic events. It is intended to blend into the general MRC response structure early in disaster stabilization and recovery efforts.

## **Where Should Psychological First Aid Be Used?**

Psychological First Aid is designed for delivery in diverse settings. Medical Reserve Corps members may be called upon to provide PFA in general population shelters, special needs shelters, field hospitals and medical triage areas, acute care facilities (e.g., Emergency Departments), staging areas or respite centers for first responders or other relief workers, emergency operations centers, crisis hotlines or phone banks, feeding locations, disaster assistance service centers, family reception and assistance centers, homes, businesses, and other community settings. Following weapons of mass destruction (WMD) events or other such public health emergencies, Psychological First Aid may be delivered in fatality collection points and in locations providing decontamination or mass prophylaxis services. For information on the challenges of providing PFA in some of these service sites, see Appendix A.

## **Strengths of Psychological First Aid**

- Psychological First Aid includes basic information-gathering techniques to help mental health specialists make rapid assessments of survivors' immediate concerns and needs and how to implement supportive activities in a flexible manner.
- Psychological First Aid relies on field-tested, evidence-informed strategies that can be provided in a variety of disaster settings.
- Psychological First Aid emphasizes developmentally and culturally appropriate interventions for survivors of various ages and backgrounds.
- Psychological First Aid includes important elements of risk communication and education via the use of materials and handouts that provide information for youth, adults, and families for their use over the course of recovery in contending with post-disaster reactions and adversities.

## **Basic Objectives of Psychological First Aid**

- Establish a human connection in a non-intrusive, compassionate manner.
- Enhance immediate and ongoing safety, and provide physical and emotional comfort.
- Calm and orient emotionally-overwhelmed or distraught survivors.

- Help survivors to articulate immediate needs and concerns, and gather additional information as appropriate.
- Offer practical assistance and information to help survivors address their immediate needs and concerns.
- Connect survivors as soon as possible to social support networks, including family members, friends, neighbors, and community helping resources.
- Support positive coping, acknowledge coping efforts and strengths, and empower survivors; encourage adults, children, and families to take an active role in their recovery.
- Provide information that may help survivors to cope effectively with the psychological impact of disasters.
- Facilitate continuity in disaster response efforts by clarifying how long the Psychological First Aid provider will be available, and (when appropriate) linking the survivor to another member of a disaster response team or to indigenous recovery systems, mental health services, public-sector services, and organizations.

## **Delivering Psychological First Aid**

### **Professional Behavior**

- Operate only within the framework of an authorized disaster response system.
- Model sound responses; be calm, courteous, organized, and helpful.
- Be visible and available.
- Maintain confidentiality as appropriate.
- Remain within the scope of your expertise and your designated role.
- Make appropriate referrals when additional expertise is needed or requested by the individual.
- Be knowledgeable and sensitive to issues of culture and diversity.
- Pay attention to your own emotional and physical reactions, and actively manage these reactions.

### **Guidelines for Delivering Psychological First Aid**

- Politely observe first, don't intrude. Then ask simple respectful questions, so as to be able to discuss how you may be of help.
- Initiate contact only after you have observed the situation and the person or family, and have determined that contact is not likely to be an intrusion or disruptive.
- Be prepared to be either avoided or flooded with contact by affected persons, and make brief but respectful contact with each person who approaches you.
- Speak calmly. Be patient, responsive, and sensitive.
- Speak in simple, concrete terms; don't use acronyms or responder 'jargon'. If necessary, speak slowly.
- If survivors want to talk, be prepared to listen. When you listen, focus on learning what they want to tell you and how you can be of help.
- Acknowledge the positive features of what the person has done to keep safe and reach the current setting.
- Adapt the information you provide to directly address the person's immediate goals and clarify answers repeatedly as needed.
- Give information that is accurate and age-appropriate for your audience, and correct inaccurate beliefs. If you don't know, tell them this and offer to find out.
- When communicating through a translator or interpreter, look at and talk to the person you are addressing, not at the translator or interpreter.
- Remember that the goal of Psychological First Aid is to reduce distress, assist with current needs, and promote adaptive functioning, not to elicit details of traumatic experiences and losses.

### **Working With Children and Adolescents**

- Sit or crouch at a child’s eye level.
- Help children verbalize their feelings, concerns and questions; provide simple labels for common emotional reactions (e.g., mad, sad, scared, worried). Match the children’s language to help you connect with them, and to help them to feel understood and to understand themselves. Do not increase their distress by using extreme words like “terrified” or “horrified.”
- Match your language to the child’s developmental level. Children 12 years and under typically have much less understanding of abstract concepts and metaphors compared to adults. Use direct and simple language as much as possible.
- Adolescents often appreciate having their feelings, concerns and questions addressed as adult-like, rather than child-like responses.
- Reinforce these techniques with the child’s parents to help them provide appropriate emotional support to their children.

### **Some Behaviors to Avoid**

- Do not make assumptions about what the person is experiencing or what they have been through.
- Do not assume that everyone exposed to a disaster will be traumatized.
- Do not pathologize. Most acute reactions are understandable and expectable given what people exposed to the disaster have personally experienced. Do not label reactions as ‘symptoms,’ or speak in terms of “diagnoses,” “conditions,” “pathologies,” or “disorders.”
- Do not talk down to or patronize the survivor, or focus on their helplessness, weaknesses, mistakes, or disability. Focus instead on what the person has done that is effective or may have contributed to help others in need, both during the disaster and in the present setting.
- Do not assume that all survivors want to talk or need to talk to you. Often, being physically present in a supportive and calm way helps affected people to feel safer and more able to cope.
- Do not “debrief” by asking for details of what happened.
- Do not speculate or offer erroneous or unsubstantiated information. If you don’t know something that you are asked, do your best to learn the correct facts.
- Do not suggest fad interventions or present uninformed opinion as fact.

# PREPARING TO DELIVER PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID

In order to be of assistance to disaster-affected communities, the provider must be knowledgeable about the nature of the event, the post-event circumstances, and the type and availability of relief and support services.

## Pre-planning and Preparation

Pre-planning and preparation becomes particularly important when working as an MRC member. The uniqueness of the MRC in regard to the variety of units' roles and response duties provides for a flexible resource, but pose potential communication problems unless thought about and resolved ahead of time. Prior knowledge of professional competencies (expectations and limitations), agreed upon response guidelines, organizational control, incident command structure and working guidelines of other 'partner' agencies is critical to a cooperative and functional MRC response. As MRC members, we can look to our local leadership for pre-event exercises and interagency drills to help bridge these important differences. Flexibility, open-mindedness and cooperation will be highly regarded skills early in the response.

## Entering the Setting

Psychological First Aid begins when a disaster mental health specialist enters an emergency management setting in the aftermath of a disaster (See Appendix A for examples of various service delivery sites). Successful entry involves working within the framework of an authorized Incident Command System (ICS) in which roles and decision-making are clearly defined. It is essential to establish communication and coordinate all activities with authorized personnel or organizations that are managing the setting. Effective entry also involves orienting yourself to the setting (e.g., leadership, organization, policies and procedures, security, psychiatric support) and available services. As you provide Psychological First Aid, you need to have accurate information about what is going to happen, what services are available, and where services can be found. This information needs to be gathered as soon as possible, given that providing such information is often critical to reducing distress and promoting adaptive coping.

## Providing Services

In some settings, Psychological First Aid may be provided in designated areas. In other settings, Psychological First Aid providers may circulate around the facility to identify those to be approached for assistance. Focus your attention on how people are reacting and interacting in the setting. Individuals who may need assistance include those showing signs of acute distress. This includes individuals who are:

- Disoriented
- Confused
- Frantic
- Panicky
- Extremely withdrawn, apathetic or "shut down"
- Extremely irritable or angry
- Individuals who are exceedingly worried

Decide who may need assistance or would benefit most from contact with you, and plan for how to contact them within the time and constraints of the setting.

## Maintain a Calm Presence

People take their cue from how others are reacting. By demonstrating calmness and clear thinking, you can help survivors feel that they can rely on you. Others may follow your lead in remaining focused, even if they do not feel calm, safe, effective, or even hopeful. Psychological First Aid

providers often model the sense of hope that affected persons cannot always feel while they are still attempting to deal with what happened and current pressing concerns.

### **Be Sensitive to Culture and Diversity**

Sensitivity to culture and ethnic, religious, racial, and language diversity is central to providing Psychological First Aid. It is critical to both outreach efforts and service provision. Providers should be aware of their own values and prejudices, and how these may coincide or differ with those of the community being served. Helping to maintain or reestablish customs, traditions, rituals, family structure, gender roles, and social bonds is important to helping survivors cope with the impact of a disaster. Information about the community being served, including how emotions and other psychological reactions are expressed, attitudes towards governmental agencies, and receptivity to counseling, should be gathered with the assistance of community cultural leaders who represent and best understand local cultural groups.

### **Be Aware of At-Risk Populations**

Individuals that are at special risk after a disaster include:

- children (especially children whose parents have died, were significantly injured or are missing)
- those who have had multiple relocations and displacements
- medically frail adults
- the elderly
- those with serious mental illness
- those with physical disabilities or illness
- adolescents who may be risk-takers
- adolescents and adults with substance abuse problems
- pregnant women
- mothers with babies and small children
- professionals or volunteers who participated in disaster response and recovery efforts
- those who have experienced significant loss of their possessions (e.g., home, pets, family memorabilia, etc.)
- those exposed first hand to grotesque scenes or extreme life threat

The prevalence of exposure to pre-disaster trauma may be higher among economically disadvantaged populations. As a consequence, minority and marginalized communities may have higher rates of pre-disaster trauma-related mental health problems, and are at greater risk for developing problems following disaster. Mistrust, stigma, fear (e.g., fear of deportation), and lack of knowledge about disaster relief services are important barriers to seeking, providing, and receiving services for these populations. Those living in disaster-prone regions are more likely to have had prior disaster experiences, although having dealt well with a disaster in the past may be helpful in the current situation.

# PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID CORE ACTIONS

## 1. Contact and Engagement

Goal: To respond to contacts initiated by affected persons, or initiate contacts 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) 1

Goal: To calm and orient emotionally-overwhelmed/distraught survivors.

## 4. Information Gathering: Current Needs and Concerns

Goal: To identify immediate needs and concerns, gather additional information, and tailor Psychological First Aid interventions.

## 5. Practical Assistance

Goal: To offer practical help to the survivor 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 members, friends, and community helping 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 in form and link survivors with available services needed at the time or in the future.

These core goals of Psychological First Aid constitute the basic objectives of providing early assistance (e.g., within days or weeks following an event) and will need to be addressed in a flexible way, using strategies that meet the specific needs of children, families and adults. The amount of time spent on each goal will vary from person to person, and with different circumstances according to need.

# 1. Contact and Engagement

**Goal:** To respond to contacts initiated by affected persons, or initiate contacts in a non-intrusive, compassionate, and helpful manner.

The first contact with a survivor is important. If managed in a respectful and compassionate way, it can help establish an effective helping relationship and increase the person's receptiveness to further help. Your first priority should be to manage contacts with persons who seek you out, especially if a number of people approach you simultaneously. Make contact with as many individuals as you can. Often this will be very brief, but even a brief look of interest and calm concern from another person can be grounding and helpful to people who are feeling detached or overwhelmed.

**Culture Alert:** The type of physical or personal contact that is appropriate may vary from person to person and across cultures and social groups, for example, how close to stand to someone, how much eye contact to make or how acceptable it is to touch someone. You should look for clues to a survivor's need for "personal space," and be informed about cultural norms through community cultural leaders who best understand local customs.

Others will not seek your help but may benefit from assistance. When you identify such persons, timing is important. Do not interrupt conversations. You may try to make nonverbal contact first (e.g., by returning eye contact). *Do not assume* that people will respond to your assistance with immediate positive reactions. It may take time for some survivors or bereaved persons to feel some degree of safety, confidence and trust. If an individual declines your offer of help, respect his/her decision and indicate when and where Psychological First Aid providers will be available later on.

## Introduce Yourself/Ask about Immediate Needs

Introduce yourself with your name and title, and describe your role. Ask for permission to talk to them, and explain your objective of finding out whether there is anything you can do to make things easier, or helping with ways to help themselves feel better. Unless given permission to do otherwise, address adult survivors using last names. Invite the person to sit, try to ensure some level of privacy for the conversation, and give the person your full attention. Speak softly and calmly. Refrain from looking around or being distracted. Find out whether there is any pressing problem that needs *immediate attention*. Immediate medical concerns have the utmost priority.

Adult/ Caregiver	Hello. My name is _____. I work with _____. I'm checking in with people to see how they are doing, and to see if I can help in any way. Is it okay if I talk to you for a few minutes? May I ask your name? Mrs. Williams, before we talk, is there something right now that you need, like some water or fruit juice?
Adolescent/ Child	And is this your daughter? (Get on child's eye level, smile and greet the child, using her/his name and speaking softly.) Hi Lisa, I'm _____ and I'm here to try to help you and your family. Is there anything you need right now? There is some water and juice over there, and we have a few blankets and toys in those boxes.

When making contact with children or adolescents, it is good practice to make a connection with a parent or accompanying adult to explain your role and seek permission. When speaking with a child in distress when no adult is present, it is important to find a parent or caregiver to let them know about your conversation.

## 2. Safety and Comfort

**Goal: Enhance immediate and ongoing safety, and provide physical and emotional comfort.**

Restoration of a sense of safety is an important goal in the immediate aftermath of disaster. Comfort and a sense of safety can be supported in many ways. Some strategies to accomplish this include:

- Do things that are active (rather than passive waiting), practical (using available resources), and familiar (drawing on well-learned behaviors that do not require new learning) can increase a sense of control over the situation.
- Get current accurate and up-to-date information, while avoiding exposure to inaccurate or re-traumatizing information via media, official updates, and informal conversations.
- Get connected with immediate practical resources (ways to connect with loved ones).
- Get information that is focused on how responders are making the situation safer.
- Be connected with others who have shared similar experiences.

### **Ensure Immediate Physical Safety**

Make sure that individuals and families are physically safe to the extent possible in the situation at hand. If necessary, re-organize the immediate environment to increase *physical* and *emotional* safety.

For example:

- Find the appropriate officials who can resolve safety concerns that are beyond your ability to control, such as threats, weapons, etc.
- Remove broken glass, sharp objects, furniture, spilled liquids and other objects that could cause people to trip and fall.
- Place barriers to prevent intrusions by unauthorized persons.
- Make sure that persons who may be at risk for falling (i.e., physically frail individuals) are in areas that don't require the use of stairs or are located in lower levels of the shelter.

If there are medical concerns requiring urgent attention, contact the appropriate unit leader or medical support immediately. Remain with the affected person or find someone to stay with the affected person until help can be obtained. Other safety concerns involve:

- *Threat of harm to self or others* - Look for signs that persons may hurt themselves or others (e.g., expresses intense anger towards self or others, exhibit extreme agitation). If so, seek immediate support for containment and management by medical, EMT assistance, or a security team.
- *Shock* - If an individual is showing signs of shock (pale, clammy skin, weak or rapid pulse, irregular breathing, dull or glassy eyes, unresponsive to communication, lack of bladder or bowel control, restless or agitated), seek immediate medical support.

## Enhance Sense of Predictability, Control, Comfort, and Safety

Information can help to re-orient and comfort children and families, and can include information about:

- What to do next
- What is being done to assist them
- What is currently known about the unfolding event
- Available services
- Stress reactions
- Self-care, family care, and coping

In providing information:

- Use your judgment as to whether and when to present information. Does the individual appear able to comprehend what is being said, and is he or she ready to hear the content of the messages?
- The most useful information is that which provides assistance in addressing immediate needs, reduces fears, answers pressing questions, addresses current concerns, and supports coping efforts.
- Use clear and concise language, while avoiding technical jargon.

## Provide Simple Information about Disaster Response Activities and Services

Ask survivors if they have any questions about what is going to happen, and give simple accurate information about what they can expect. *Be sure to ask about concerns regarding current danger and safety in their new situation.* Try to connect survivors with information that addresses these concerns. If you do not have specific information, *do not* guess or invent information in order to provide reassurance. Instead, develop a plan with the person for ways you and he/she can gather the needed information. Examples of what you might say include:

Adult/ Caregiver/ Adolescent	From what I understand, we will start transporting people to the shelter at West High School in about an hour. There will be food, clean clothing, and a place to rest. Stay in this area. A member of the team will look for you here when we are ready to go.
Child	Here's what's going to happen next. You and your mom are going to go together soon to a place called a shelter, which really is just a safe building with food, clean clothing, and a place to rest. Stay here close to your mom until people are ready to go.

**Do not** reassure people that they are safe *unless you have definite factual information that this is the case.* Also do not reassure people of the availability of goods or services (e.g., toys, food, medicines, etc.) unless you have definite information that such goods and services will be available. For example, you may say:

Adult/ Caregiver	Mrs. Williams, I want to assure you that you are in good hands. The fire has been contained, and you and your family are not in danger from the fire. Do you have any concerns about your family's safety right now?
Adolescent	We're working hard to make you and your family safe. Do you have any questions about what happened, or what is going to be done to keep everyone safe?
Child	Your mom and dad are here, and many people are all working hard together so that you and your family will be safe. Do you have any questions about what we're doing to keep you safe?

### **Attend to Physical Comfort**

Look for simple ways to make the physical environment more comfortable. If possible, consider things like temperature, lighting, air quality, access to furniture, and how the furniture is arranged. In order to reduce feelings of helplessness or dependency, encourage affected persons to participate in getting things needed for comfort (e.g., offer to walk over to the supply area with the person rather than retrieving supplies for them). Help them regain or exercise their ability to soothe and comfort themselves and others around them. For children, toys like soft Teddy Bears that they can hold and take care of, can help them to soothe themselves (Note: avoid offering such toys if there are not enough to go around to all children who may request them). You can help them learn how to take care of themselves by explaining how they can “care” for their toy, (e.g., “Remember that she needs to drink lots of water and eat three meals a day – and you can do that too.”)

### **Promote Social Engagement**

Facilitate proximity to other people as appropriate. It is generally soothing and reassuring to be near other people who seem to be coping adequately with the situation. On the other hand, it is upsetting being near others who appear very agitated and emotionally overwhelmed. If they have heard worrying information from others or circulating rumors, help to clarify these and correct misinformation.

Children, and to some extent adolescents, are particularly likely to look to adults for cues about safety and appropriate behavior. When possible, place children near adults or peers who appear relatively calm given the circumstances, and shield them from close proximity to highly distressed individuals. Offer brief explanations to children and adolescents who have observed extreme reactions in other survivors.

Child/ Adolescent	“That man is so upset that he can't calm down yet. Someone from our team is trying to help him calm down.”
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As appropriate, encourage people who are coping adequately to talk with others who are currently distressed or not coping as well. Those coping adequately may have concerns about being burdened by others' fears and anger. However, you can reassure them that talking to people, especially if the conversation focuses on things that people hold in common (for example, coming from nearby neighborhoods or sharing new information), can help them support one another. This often reduces a sense of isolation and helplessness in both parties. If feasible, provide access to age-appropriate materials that foster soothing activities. For children, encourage social activities like reading out loud, doing a joint art activity, and playing cards, board games, or sports.

## **Attend to Children Who Are Separated from their Parents**

Parents play a crucial role in children's perceived sense of safety following disasters. In the event that children are separated from their parents, helping them reconnect quickly is a priority. Try to help create a sense of security for children while their parents are being located or during periods of time where parents may become emotionally overwhelmed and are thus not emotionally accessible to their children.

For children separated from parents, help to create a designated child-friendly space. This can be a corner or room, ideally separate from rescue activities, warm, and with one door to control those who come in and out. Pre-prepared kits with toys, paper and markers, books, etc. are helpful. Examples of calming, soothing, reassuring activities that have been found to be useful are playing with Legos or other basic building materials, using play dough, doing cut-outs or other simple art projects that keep the hands busy, and working on coloring books (containing neutral scenes of flowers, rainbows, trees, or cute animals). Arrange for this space to be staffed with providers who are known and respected, who can help supervise activities that foster engagement, active interaction, and education at the appropriate developmental level. That person should be able to promote calmness among those children. Older children may be engaged as mentors/role models for younger children, as appropriate. Do not make any promises that you may not be able to keep, such as promising that they will be with their parents soon. Do provide accurate information in easy-to-understand terms so that the children will know who will be supervising them and what activities to expect next.

In addition to securing the children's physical safety, it is also important to protect them from exposure to additional traumatic stimuli including sights, sounds, or smells that may be frightening. One psychologist working with a fire department described how responders would use their big yellow coats to help shield the child from traumatic sights while leading them to a safe place. The "big coat" analogy is an important one to keep in mind, as you will temporarily become that cover for the child. Use this time to find out the children's names, state your understanding of the situation, and reassure them that you are taking them to a safe place while adults work to connect them with their families.

In selecting a safe place for the children to rest while family members are located, think again about shielding them with a 'big coat'. Try to find a place that is out of high-traffic areas. Even if you are positioned away from the injured and dead, children are likely to become distressed watching adults rush around in their rescue efforts. Finding rooms or structures to serve as walls can protect children from traumatic stimuli as well as help them focus on calming and reassuring activities.

## **Protect from Additional Traumatic Experiences and Trauma Reminders**

Protect survivors from unnecessary exposure to additional trauma and trauma reminders (e.g., reduce exposure to the suffering of others). Psychological First Aid providers should look for ways to minimize additional distressing experiences. When necessary, try to shield survivors from reporters, other media professionals, onlookers or attorneys. Help protect their privacy.

If survivors have access to media coverage (e.g., television or radio broadcasts), point out that excessive viewing of such coverage can be highly upsetting, especially for children and adolescents. Encourage parents to monitor and limit their children's exposure to the media, and discuss their children's concerns after such viewing. Parents can let their children know that they are keeping track of information from the media, and that children can get this information from them so that they don't need to watch television. Remind parents to be careful about what they say in front of their children, and to clarify things that might have upset them.

Adult/ Caregiver	“You’ve been through a lot, and it’s a good idea to shield yourself and your children from further frightening or disturbing sights and sounds as much as possible. Even televised scenes of the disaster can be very disturbing to children. Sometimes children worry that the disaster is happening all over again. You may find that your children feel better if you limit their television viewing of the disaster. It doesn’t hurt for adults to take a break from all the media coverage, too.”
Child and Adolescent	“You’ve been through a lot already. People often want to watch TV or look for information on the internet after something like this, but this can be pretty scary. It’s best to stay away from TV or radio programs that show this stuff. You can also tell your mom or dad if you see something that bothers you.”

### 3. Stabilization (if needed)

**Goal: To calm and orient emotionally-overwhelmed or disoriented survivors.**

Most individuals affected by a disaster or other traumatic incident will not require stabilization. Expressions of strong emotions, even muted emotions (e.g., numb, indifferent, spaced-out, or confused), are expectable reactions to disaster, and do not of themselves signal the need for additional intervention beyond ordinary supportive contact.

#### **Stabilize Emotionally-Overwhelmed Survivors**

Observe individuals for signs of being disorientated or overwhelmed. Signs include:

- Looking glassy eyed and vacant – unable to find direction
- Unresponsiveness to verbal questions or commands
- Disorientation (e.g., engaging in aimless disorganized behavior)
- Exhibiting strong emotional responses, uncontrollable crying, hyperventilating, rocking or regressive behavior
- Experiencing uncontrollable physical reactions (shaking, trembling)
- Exhibiting frantic searching behavior
- Feeling incapacitated by worry
- Engaging in risky activities

If the person is too upset, agitated, withdrawn, or disoriented to talk, or shows extreme anxiety, fear, or panic, the Psychological First Aid provider should consider:

- Is the person alone or in the company of family and friends? If family or friends are present, it may be helpful to enlist their aid in comforting or providing emotional support to the distressed person. Alternatively, you may take a distressed individual aside to a quiet place, or speak quietly with that person while family/friends are nearby.
- What is the person experiencing? Is he/she crying, panicking, experiencing a “flashback” or imagining that the event is taking place again? When intervening, address the person’s primary immediate concern or difficulty, rather than simply trying to convince the person to “calm down” or to “feel safe” (neither of which tend to be effective).

For children or adolescents, consider:

- Is the child or adolescent with his/her parents? If so, briefly assess the situation to make sure that the adult is coping. Focus on empowering the parents in their role of calming their children. Do not move in and supplant the parents, and be careful to avoid making any comments that may undermine the parents’ authority or ability to handle the situation. Let them know that you are available to assist in any way that they find helpful.
- If emotionally-overwhelmed children or adolescents are separated from their parents or if their parents are not coping well, refer below to the options for stabilizing distressed persons.

Options for stabilizing distressed persons include:

- Respect the person’s privacy, and give him/her a few minutes alone. Tell them that you will be available if they need you or that you will check back with them in a few minutes to see how they are doing and if there’s anything you can do to help at that time.
- Remain present, and offer a drink or chair, rather than trying to talk directly to the person, as this may contribute to cognitive/emotional overload. Make small talk, talk to other persons in the vicinity, do some paperwork, or in other ways demonstrate that you are occupied with other tasks but available should the person need or wish to receive further practical or emotional help.
- Offer support and help him or her focus on specific manageable feelings, thoughts, and goals.

## **Talking Points for Emotionally-Overwhelmed Survivors**

### ***Adults or Caregivers***

- Intense emotions may come and go like waves.
- Shocking experiences trigger strong and healthy, but often upsetting, self-protective “alarm” reactions in the body.
- Sometimes the best way to recover is to take a time-out (e.g., breathe deeply, go for a walk).
- Friends and family are very important sources of support to help you calm down.

### ***Children and Adolescents***

- These feelings come and go like waves in the ocean. When you feel really bad, that’s a good time to talk to your mom and dad to help you calm down.
- Even adults need help at times like this.
- Many adults are working together to respond to the disaster and to help people who were affected.
- Staying busy can help you deal with your feelings and start to make things better.
- Caution adolescents about doing something quickly just to feel better, without discussing it with a parent or trusted adult.

Adolescent/ Child	“Is there anyone who helps you feel better when you talk to them? Maybe I can help you get hold of them.”  “You are doing a great job of letting grown-ups know what you need. It is important to keep letting people know how they can help you.”
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If the person appears extremely agitated, shows a rush of speech, seems to be losing touch with the surroundings, or is experiencing ongoing intense crying, it may be helpful to:

- Ask the individual to listen to you and look at you.
- Find out if they know who they are, where they are, and what is happening.
- Ask him/her to describe the surroundings, and say where both of you are.
- Clarify what has happened and the order of events (without graphic details).

A technique to help stabilize agitated children and adults is called ‘grounding.’ You can introduce grounding by saying:

“After a frightening experience, you can sometimes find yourself overwhelmed with emotions or unable to stop thinking about or imagining what happened.” You can use a method called “grounding” to feel less overwhelmed. Grounding works by turning your attention from your thoughts to the outside world. Here’s what you do....”

- Sit in a comfortable position with your legs and arms uncrossed.
- Breathe in and out slowly and deeply.
- Look around you and identify five non-distressing things that you can *see*. Name each thing in your mind, for example you could say, “I see the floor, I see a shoe, I see a table, I see a chair, I see a person.”
- Breathe in and out slowly and deeply.
- Next, identify five sounds you can *hear*. Name each thing in your mind. For example you could say, “I hear a woman talking, I hear myself breathing, I hear a door close, I hear someone typing, I hear a cell phone ringing.”
- Breathe in and out slowly and deeply.
- Next, identify five things you can *feel*. Name each thing in your mind. For example, you could say, “I can feel this wooden armrest with my hands, I can feel my toes inside my shoes, I can feel my back pressing against my chair, I can feel the blanket in my hands, I can feel my lips pressed together.”
- Breathe in and out slowly and deeply.

If none of these interventions aids in emotional stabilization, consultation with mental health colleagues and/or psychiatric consultation for medication may be indicated.

## 4. Information Gathering: Needs and Current Concerns

**Goal:** To identify immediate needs and concerns, gather additional information, and tailor Psychological First Aid interventions.

Gathering and clarifying information begins immediately after contact, and is ongoing throughout Psychological First Aid (as appropriate). As immediate needs and concerns are identified and addressed, it is useful to gather and clarify additional information. Remember that in most Psychological First Aid service delivery contexts, time, survivors' needs and priorities, and other factors will limit information gathering. However, although a formal assessment is not appropriate, the provider may ask pertinent questions to obtain and clarify a variety of issues that can inform decisions about:

- Need for Immediate Referral
- Need for Additional Services
- Offering a Follow-up Meeting
- Using Components of Psychological First Aid that may be helpful

It may be especially useful for the provider to ask some questions to clarify the following:

### *Nature and severity of experiences during the disaster*

Children, adolescents and adults who have had the most serious forms of exposure to direct life-threat to self or loved ones, injury to self, or witnessing injury or death may likely experience more severe and prolonged distress. Those who felt extremely terrified and helpless may also have more difficulty in recovering.

Information about this may be elicited with questions like:

Child and Adolescent	<p>“I know that you’ve been through a lot of difficult things. Would it be helpful to talk about any of what you have been through?”</p> <p>Where were you during the hurricane? Did you get hurt? Did you see anyone get hurt? How afraid were you?</p>
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***Provider Alert:* In clarifying disaster-related traumatic experiences, the Psychological First Aid provider should avoid asking for in-depth description of traumatic experiences, as this may provoke unnecessary additional distress. It is especially important to follow the lead of the survivor in discussing what happened during the event. Individuals should not be pressed to disclose details of any trauma or loss. On the other hand, if individuals are anxious to talk about their experiences, let them know politely and respectfully that what would be most helpful now is to get some basic information to be able to help with what is currently needed and plan for future care. Let them know that the opportunity to discuss their experiences in a proper professional setting can be arranged for the future.**

For people with these experiences, provide information about post-disaster reactions, information about coping, and offer a follow-up meeting.

### *Death of a family member or close friend*

Loss of loved ones under traumatic circumstances is devastating, and over time can greatly complicate the grieving process.

Information about loss may be elicited with a question like:

Adult/ Caregiver	“Did someone close to you get hurt or die as a result of the hurricane? What happened?”
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For those with loss, provide emotional comfort, information about coping, information about social support, information on traumatic grief and offer a follow-up meeting.

### ***Concerns about immediate post-disaster circumstances and ongoing threat***

Especially in regard to complicated emergencies, concerns over immediate and ongoing danger can be a major source of distress.

Information about this may be elicited with questions like:

Adult/ Caregiver	Do you need any information to help you better understand what has happened? Do you need information about how to keep you and your family safe? Do you need information about what is being done to protect the public?
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For those with these concerns, help with obtaining risk-related information.

### ***Separations from or concern about the safety of loved ones***

Separation from loved ones, and concern over their safety, constitute additional sources of distress in the aftermath of disaster. If not earlier addressed, information may be elicited with questions like these:

Adult/ Caregiver	Are you worried about anyone close to you right now? Do you know where they are? Is there anyone especially important like a family member or friend who is missing?
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For survivors with these concerns, provide practical assistance to help locate and reunite family members, or develop a strategy for seeking information about persons of concern.

### ***Physical illness and need for medications***

Pre-existing medical conditions and need for medications constitute additional sources of post-disaster distress and adversity. Immediate medical concerns need to be given a high priority.

Information about this may be elicited with questions like:

Adult/ Caregiver	Do you have any physical or medical condition that needs attention? Do you need any medications that you don't have? Do you need to have a prescription filled?
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For those with medical conditions, provide practical assistance in obtaining medical care and medication. Connect with additional services if needed.

### ***Losses incurred as a result of the disaster (home, school, neighborhood, business, personal property, or pets)***

Extensive material losses and their associated post-disaster adversities can significantly interfere with recovery, and are often be associated with feelings of depression, demoralization, and hopelessness over time.

Information about this may be elicited with questions like:

Adult/ Caregiver	Was your home badly damaged or destroyed? Did you lose other important personal property? Did a pet die or get lost? Was your business, school, or neighborhood badly damaged or destroyed?
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For those with losses, provide emotional comfort, practical assistance to help link with available resources, information about coping, and information about social support.

### ***Extreme feelings of guilt or shame***

These extreme negative emotions can be very painful, difficult and challenging, especially for children and adolescents. Remember that children and adults may be ashamed to discuss these feelings. One approach would be to listen carefully for signs of these emotions in their comments, then make clarifying comments such as:

Adult/ Caregiver	It sounds like you are being really hard on yourself about what happened. It seems like you feel that you could have done more.
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For those with these negative emotions, provide emotional comfort and information about coping.

### ***Thoughts about causing harm to self or others***

Disasters can evoke overwhelming feelings of grief, anxiety, depression, and anger. Getting a sense of whether an individual is having thoughts about causing harm to self or others should be handled sensitively.

Information about this may be elicited with questions like:

Adult/ Caregiver	Sometimes situations like these can be very overwhelming for individuals. Have you had any thoughts about harming yourself? Have you had any thoughts about harming someone else?
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For those with these thoughts, escort them to medical services.

### ***Lack of adequate supportive social network***

Lack of adequate family and community support can greatly interfere with the ability to cope with distress and post-disaster adversity.

Information about this may be elicited with questions like:

Adult/ Caregiver	Are there family members, friends, or community agencies that you can rely on for help in dealing with problems you are facing as a result of the disaster?
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For those in this situation, provide linkage with available resources and services, information about coping, information about social support, and offer a follow-up meeting.

## ***Prior alcohol or drug use***

***Provider Alert:*** In clarifying prior history of substance use, prior trauma and loss, and prior mental health problems (as in the sections below) the Psychological First Aid provider should be sensitive to the immediate needs of the survivor, avoid asking for a history if not appropriate, and avoid asking for in-depth description. It may be helpful to link the questions to clear reasons for asking (for example, “Sometimes events like this can remind individuals of previous bad times...” “Sometimes individuals who use alcohol to cope with stress will notice an increase in drinking following an event such as this...”).

Exposure to trauma and post-disaster adversities can exacerbate ongoing substance use, cause relapse of past substance abuse, or lead to new abuse.

Information about this may be elicited with questions like:

Adult/ Caregiver	Do you tend to use alcohol, prescription medications, or drugs as a way to cope with stress? Have you had any problems in the past with alcohol or drug use?
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For those with potential substance use problems, provide information about coping, information about social support, link to appropriate services and offer a follow-up meeting.

## ***Prior exposure to trauma and loss***

Those with a history of exposure to trauma or loss may experience more severe and prolonged post-disaster reactions, and a “rekindling” of prior trauma reactions.

Information about this may be elicited with questions like:

Adult/ Caregiver	Sometimes events like this can remind individuals of previous bad times. Have you ever been in a hurricane or other disaster before? Has some other bad thing happened to you in the past? Have you ever had someone close to you die?
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For those with prior exposure, provide information about post-disaster reactions, information about coping, and offer a follow-up meeting.

## ***Prior psychological problems***

Those with a history of psychological problems may experience an exacerbation of these problems and more severe and prolonged post-disaster reactions.

Information about this may be elicited with a question like:

Adult/ Caregiver	Sometimes events like this can make existing psychological problems worse. Have you ever had any treatment or taken medication for a mental health problem?
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For those with prior psychological problems, provide information about post-disaster reactions, information about coping, information about social support, link with appropriate services, and offer a follow-up meeting.

***Specific youth, adult, and family concerns over developmental impact***

Interference with anticipated developmental activities and opportunities resulting from disaster and post-disaster circumstances may cause distress and concern.

Information about this may be elicited with questions like:

Adult/ Caregiver	Were there any special things or events (birthday, graduation, beginning of the school year, vacation) coming up that were disrupted by the hurricane?
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For those with developmental concerns, provide information about coping and link with appropriate services.

It is also useful to ask a general open-ended question to make sure that you have not missed any important information.

Adult/ Caregiver/ Child	Is there anything else we have not talked about that is important for me to know?
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The Psychological First Aid provider will need to use judgment about how to gather this information, how much information to gather, and to what extent to ask questions, while remaining sensitive to the needs of the person. If the survivor identifies multiple concerns, summarize these and help to identify which issue is most pressing.

## 5. Practical Assistance

**Goal:** To offer practical help to the survivor in addressing immediate needs and concerns.

Assisting the survivor with current or anticipated problems is a central component of Psychological First Aid. Ongoing adversities and continuing problems resulting from a disaster can add significantly to the stress level of the survivor, distract from self-care, and help maintain distress reactions. Also, survivors may welcome a pragmatic focus on a current problem that is uppermost in their mind. Often, it is important to help them with problem-solving in regard to important problems.

Discussion of immediate needs occurs throughout a Psychological First Aid contact, and as much as possible, you should help the affected individual address those needs. Assistance may be helpful because problem-solving may be more difficult for the survivor under conditions of stress and adversity.

### Identify the Most Immediate Need(s)

If several needs or current concerns have been mentioned by the survivor, it will be necessary to focus on them one at a time. For some needs there will be immediate solutions (e.g., getting something to eat, phoning a family member to reassure them that the survivor is OK). It will not be possible to rapidly solve other needs (e.g., locating a lost loved one, returning to previous routines, securing insurance for lost property, acquiring caregiving services for family members), but it may be possible to take concrete action steps that address the problem (e.g., completing a missing persons report or insurance form, applying for caregiving services).

As you collaborate with the survivor, help him or her to select issues requiring immediate help. For example you might say:

Adult/ Caregiver	“I understand from what you’re telling me, Mrs. Williams, that your main goal right now is to find your husband and make sure he’s okay. Not knowing that he’s safe and not being able to talk to him is very upsetting. We need to focus on helping you get in contact with him. In order to do that, let’s make a plan on how to go about getting this information.
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### Clarify the Need

Talk with the survivor to specify the problem. If the problem is understood and clarified, it will be easier to identify practical steps that can be taken to address it.

### Discuss an Action Plan

Discuss what can be done to address the individual’s need or concern. The survivor may indicate what he or she would like to be done, or you can offer a suggestion. Knowing what services are available ahead of time will ensure that appropriate assistance can be provided about services related to obtaining food, clothing, shelter, medical, mental health, spiritual care services, financial assistance, help in determining the location of missing family members or friends, and volunteer opportunities for those who feel a need to contribute to relief efforts. Inform survivors about what they can realistically expect in terms of potential resources and support, qualification criteria, and application procedures.

### Act to Address the Need

Follow through in making an active response. For example, help the person make contact or set an appointment with a needed service, or assist them in completing paperwork.

## 6. Connection with Social Supports

**Goal:** To help establish brief or ongoing contacts with primary support persons or other sources of support, including family members, friends, and community helping resources.

### **Enhance Access to Primary Support Persons (Family and Significant Others)**

An immediate concern for most affected persons is being able to communicate with individuals with whom they have a primary relationship (e.g., spouse/partner, children, parents, other family members, close friends, clergy). Social support can play a strong role in recovery from trauma. Therefore, an important Psychological First Aid objective is to take practical steps to enable the person to make contact (in person, by phone, by e-mail) with individuals for whom the person feels the greatest concern (e.g., a child or frail elderly parent from whom the person has been separated) or the greatest need to be with right now at that moment.

### **Encourage Use of Immediately Available Support Persons**

If individuals are disconnected from their social support network, encourage them to make use of immediately available sources of social support (i.e., yourself, other relief workers, other affected persons), while being respectful of individual preferences. For example, it can help to offer adults reading materials (e.g., magazines, fact sheets) and discuss the material with them. When people are in close proximity to each other, ask them, as a group, if they have questions or requests with which you can help. These group discussions can help provide a starting point for further conversations and encourage social connectedness.

It can be helpful to bring similar-age children together in a shared activity - as long as they are not separated from their adult caregivers. Providing art materials, coloring books, or building materials can help younger children engage in soothing, familiar activities. Older children and adolescents can be helpful in encouraging the younger children to participate. Children may have suggestions of songs to sing or classroom games that they have played at school during recess. Several activities can be done with only paper and a pencil:

- Tic-tac-toe
- Folding “fortune tellers”
- Air hockey: wad up a piece of paper and have children try to blow it across the table into the other teams goal (Bonus: can be used to practice deep breathing exercises)
- Group drawing: have children sit in a circle, the first child begins a drawing. After 10 seconds, that child passes the drawing to the child on their right. Continue until everyone has added to the drawing. Then show the group the final picture. Suggest that the children draw something positive (not pictures of the disaster), something that promotes a better sense of protection and safety.
- Scribble game: pair up youth, one person makes a scribble on the paper, their partner has to add to the scribble to turn it into something

### **Discuss Support-Seeking and Giving**

You can help survivors understand the value of social support, and how to be supportive to others. For instance, you can share that experts recommend that connection with others is an important factor in recovery from a disaster. Let them know that there are differences between normal stress and traumatic stress, which can cause people to want to avoid traumatic memories, or feel flooded by the memories. Let them know that, following trauma, some people choose not to talk about traumatic experiences at all, or not until a later time when they feel secure enough re-visit the experience. And when a person feels comfortable talking, they may need to discuss the event on numerous occasions. Spending time

with people one feels close to and accepted by, without having to talk, can feel good. For example, your message might be:

Adult/ Caregiver	“When you’re able to leave the Assistance Center you may just want to be with the people you feel close to. You may find that talking some about what each of you has been through can be helpful. You can decide when and what to talk about. You don’t have to talk about everything that occurred; only what you choose to share with each person. It’s good not to rush the talking, but also not to wait if it would help you or them to talk.”
Adolescent	“When something really upsetting like this happens, even if you don’t feel like talking, be sure to ask for what you need. Also, you might find that you will feel better if you try to help other people.”
Child	<p>“You are doing a great job of letting grown-ups know what you need. It is important to keep letting people know how they can help you.”</p> <p>“You’re doing some great things to help the grown-ups too, like keeping an eye on your little brother and talking with these other kids who are scared.”</p> <p>“The more help you get, the more you can make things better. Even grown-ups need help at times like this.”</p>

As a helper, you can model positive supportive responses, such as:

Reflective comments:

"It sounds like..."

"From what you're saying, I can see how you would be...."

"It sounds like you're saying...."

"You seem really...."

Make sure your reflections are correct by using sentences like:

“Tell me if I’m wrong ... it sounds like you ...”

“Am I right when I say that you ...”

Supportive comments

"No wonder you feel..."

"It sounds really hard..."

"It sounds like you're being hard on yourself..."

"It is such a tough thing to go through something like this."

"I'm really sorry this is such a tough time for you."

"We can talk more tomorrow if you'd like..."

Empowering Comments and Questions:

"What have you done in the past to make yourself better when things got difficult?"

"Are there any things that you think would help you to feel better?"

"I have an information sheet with some ideas about how to deal with difficult situations. Maybe there is an idea or two here that might be helpful for you...."

"People can be very different in what helps them to feel better. When things get difficult, for me, it helped me to..... Would something like that work for you?"

If appropriate, distribute handouts such as those provided in **Appendix E**. These handouts are intended for adults and older adolescents. Discuss the following points:

If an individual is reluctant to seek support, there may be many reasons, including:

- Not knowing what they need (and perhaps feeling that they should know)
- Feeling embarrassed or weak because of needing help
- Feeling guilty about receiving help when others are in greater need
- Not knowing where to turn for help when everyone else also needs help
- Worrying that they will be a burden or depress others
- Fearing that they will get so upset that they'll lose control
- Doubting that such support will be helpful
- Preferring to avoid thinking or having feelings about what happened
- Telling themselves that “no one can understand what I’m going through”
- Having tried to get help and felt that help wasn’t there (feeling let down or betrayed)
- Fearing the people they ask will be angry at them or make them feel guilty for needing help

### **When Support is Not Working:**

You may need to inform individuals that if someone they care about is showing *extreme social isolation or withdrawal*, they can help the person choose specific ways to be involved with other people in a way that they feel will be helpful. A friend or loved one may need to also know that there are other people who can listen if more help is needed (i.e., primary care doctor, chaplain, support group, or counselor). Let them know that positive social support, in any way that is acceptable to them, is one of the most crucial factors in recovery from a disaster. They can enlist help from others in their social circle so that they all take part in supporting the person. They can also encourage their friend/loved one to get involved in a support group with others who have had similar experiences, or accompany them in seeking professional help.

## 7. Information on Coping

**Goal: To provide information (about stress reactions and coping) to reduce distress and promote adaptive functioning.**

Disasters can be disorienting, confusing, and overwhelming. Various types of information can help to re-orient children and adults to their situation. Such information includes:

- What is currently known about the unfolding event
- What is being done to assist them
- What services are available
- Post-disaster reactions and how to manage them
- Self-care, family care, and coping

Psychological First Aid providers should use judgment as to when to present information, and provide the type of information that is most pertinent and useful. The most useful information provides assistance in addressing immediate needs, reducing distress, addressing current concerns, and supporting positive coping efforts.

### **Provide Basic Information about Stress Reactions**

If appropriate, it may be useful to briefly discuss common stress reactions being experienced by the survivor. Stress reactions may be alarming for survivors. Some will be frightened or otherwise distressed by their own responses to an event; some may view their reactions in negative and distressing ways (e.g., my reactions mean “There’s something wrong with me,” or “I’m weak”). Therefore, individuals may benefit from explanations about reactions that they are experiencing, and understanding that these reactions are normal and expectable. Some important considerations in the process of educating survivors about their reactions include:

- Build any discussion around their individual reactions.
- Take care to avoid pathologizing survivor responses; don’t use terms like “symptoms.”
- Distribute the appended handouts consistent with content areas. This will allow a way for survivors to review these materials after your meeting. Remember that stress may interfere with the ability to understand and remember information.

**Provider Alert: While it may be helpful to describe common stress reactions and note that intense reactions are common but often diminish over time, it is also important to avoid providing “blanket” reassurance that stress reactions will disappear. This may set up unrealistic expectations, resulting in negative views of self if reactions persist.**

### **Review Common Psychological Reactions to Traumatic Experiences and Losses**

Especially for individuals who have had significant exposure to trauma and have sustained significant losses, provide basic psycho-education about common distress reactions. The Psychological First Aid provider can review these, again emphasizing that such reactions are understandable and expectable. Inform survivors that if these reactions continue to interfere with their ability to function adequately for over a month, psychological services should be considered.

Many individuals who have had traumatic experiences suffer from ongoing reactions that are distressing and can lead to difficulties in daily life.

**Provider Alert:** The following basic information is presented as an overview for the Psychological First Aid provider so that issues arising from survivors' past experiences and post-disaster reactions can be selectively discussed as appropriate.

There are three types of posttraumatic stress reactions:

***Intrusive reactions*** are ways in which the traumatic experience comes back to mind. These reactions include distressing thoughts or images of the event (e.g., picturing what one saw), or dreams about what happened. Among children, bad dreams can occur that may not be specifically about the disaster. Intrusive reactions also include upsetting emotional or physical reactions to reminders of the experience. Some people may act like one of their worst experiences is happening all over again. This is called "a flashback."

***Avoidance and withdrawal reactions*** are ways people use to keep away from, or protect against, intrusive reactions. These reactions include efforts to avoid talking, thinking and having feelings about the traumatic event, and to avoid any reminders of the event, including places and people connected to what happened. Emotions can become restricted, even numb, to protect against distress. Feelings of detachment and estrangement from others may lead to social withdrawal. There may be a loss of interest in usually pleasurable activities.

***Physical arousal reactions*** are physical changes that make the body react as if danger is still present. These reactions include constantly being "on the lookout" for danger, startling easily or being jumpy, irritability, or experiencing outbursts of anger, difficulty falling or staying asleep, and difficulty concentrating or paying attention.

It is also useful to discuss the role of trauma reminders, loss reminders, and hardships in contributing to distress.

***Trauma Reminders*** can be sights, sounds, places, smells, specific people, times of the day, situations, or even feelings, like being afraid or anxious. Trauma reminders can evoke upsetting thoughts and feelings about what happened. Examples include the sound of wind, rain, helicopters, screaming or shouting, and specific people who were present at the time. Reminders are related to a specific type of event, such as hurricane, earthquake, flood, tornado or fire. Over time, avoidance of reminders can make it hard for people to do what they normally do or need to do.

***Loss Reminders*** can also be sights, sounds, places, smells, specific people, the time of day, situations, or feelings. Loss reminders bring to mind the absence of a loved one. Missing the deceased can bring up strong feelings, like sadness, feeling nervous, feeling uncertain about what life will be without them, feeling angry, feeling alone or abandoned, or feeling hopeless. Examples include seeing a picture of a lost loved one, or seeing their belongings, like their clothes. Loss reminders can also lead to avoiding things that people want to do or need to do.

***Change Reminders*** can be things (people, places, things, activities, or hardships) that remind us of how our lives have changed from what they used to be as the result of a disaster. This can be something as simple as waking up in a different bed in the morning, or going to a different school, or being in a different place. Even nice things can remind us of how things have changed, and make us miss what we had before.

**Hardships** often follow in the wake of disasters, and can make it more difficult to recover. Hardships place additional strains on children and families, and can contribute to feelings of anxiety, depression, irritability, uncertainty, and mental and physical exhaustion. Examples of hardships include: loss of home or possessions, lack of money, shortages of food or water, separations from friends and family, medical or physical health problems, the process of obtaining compensation for losses, school closures, being moved to a new area, and lack of fun things for children to do.

Other kinds of reactions include grief reactions, depression and physical reactions.

**Grief Reactions** will be prevalent among those who survived the disaster but have suffered many types of losses – including loss of loved ones, home, possessions, pets, schools, and community. Loss may lead to feelings of sadness and anger, guilt or regret over the loss, missing or longing for the deceased, and dreams of seeing the person again. These grief reactions are normal, vary from person to person, and can last for many years after the loss. There is no single “correct” course of grieving. Importantly, personal, family, religious and cultural factors affect the course of grief. Although grief reactions may be painful to experience, especially at first, they are healthy reactions and reflect the ongoing significance of the loss. Over time, grief reactions tend to include more pleasant thoughts and activities, such as positive reminiscing or finding positive ways to memorialize or remember a loved one.

**Traumatic Grief** occurs when children and adults have suffered the traumatic loss of a loved one, and often makes grieving more difficult. In traumatic death, there is a tendency for the mind stay focused on the circumstances of the death, including preoccupations with how the loss could have been prevented, what the last moments were like, and issues of accountability. Traumatic grief reactions include intrusive, disturbing images of the manner of death that interfere with positive remembering and reminiscing, delay in the onset of healthy grief reactions, retreat from close relationships with family and friends, and avoidance of usual activities because they are reminders of the traumatic loss. Traumatic grief changes the course of mourning, putting individuals on a different time course than may be expected by other family members. Often, traumatic grief reactions can clash with the timing of religious rituals and other cultural expressions of mourning.

**Depression** can be an additional major concern. Depression is associated with prolonged grief reactions and strongly related to the accumulation of post-disaster adversities. Reactions include: persistent depressed or irritable mood; loss of appetite; sleep disturbance, often early morning awakening; greatly diminished interest or pleasure in life activities; fatigue or loss of energy; feelings of worthlessness or guilt; feelings of hopelessness; and sometimes thoughts about suicide. Demoralization is a common response to unfulfilled expectations about improvement in post-disaster adversities, and resignation to adverse changes in life circumstances.

**Physical Reactions** may be commonly experienced, even in the absence of any underlying physical injury or illness. These reactions include: headaches; dizziness; stomachaches; muscle aches; rapid heart beating; tightness in the chest; loss of appetite; and bowel problems.

These handouts may be useful and can be found in **Appendix E**.

- **Handout: When Terrible Things Happen** describes common reactions and positive/negative coping
- **Handouts: Tips for Helping Preschool Age children; Tips for Helping School Age Children; and Tips for Helping Adolescents** are intended to be given to parents and caregivers. These describe common reactions for children in different age groups (6

years old and younger, 6-12 years old, adolescents), and give suggestions on ways for parents/caregivers to help their children adjust.

### **Provide Basic Information on Ways of Coping**

It may also be appropriate and helpful to discuss various ways of coping.

*Adaptive coping actions* are those that help to reduce anxiety, lessen other distressing reactions, and improve the situation. In general, coping methods that are likely to be helpful include:

- Talking to another person for support
- Getting adequate rest, diet, exercise
- Engaging in positive distracting activities (sports, hobbies, reading)
- Trying to maintain a normal schedule to the extent possible
- Scheduling pleasant activities
- Eating healthy meals
- Taking breaks
- Spending time with others
- Participating in a support group
- Using relaxation methods
- Using calming self talk
- Exercising in moderation
- Seeking counseling
- Keeping a journal

*Maladaptive coping actions* tend to perpetuate problems. Such actions include:

- Using alcohol or drugs to cope
- Withdrawing from activities
- Withdrawing from family or friends
- Working too many hours
- Getting angry or violent
- Blaming others
- Overeating
- Watching too much TV or playing too many computer games
- Doing risky or dangerous things
- Not taking care of oneself (sleep, diet, exercise, etc.)

The aim of discussing positive and negative forms of coping is to:

- Help survivors consider coping options
- Identify and acknowledge their coping strengths
- Explore the negative consequences of maladaptive coping actions
- Encourage survivors to make conscious choices about how to cope
- Enhance a sense of control over coping and adjustment

As noted above, *Handout: When Terrible Things Happen* reviews positive and negative coping for survivors in general. This handout can be found in **Appendix E**.

## Demonstrate Simple Relaxation Techniques

Breathing exercises help reduce feelings of over-arousal and physical tension. Simple exercises such as these can be taught in a brief period. Children and adolescents can use these techniques also, and it may be helpful for parents to prompt their children (or vice versa) to use these techniques several times a day.

**Handout: Basic Relaxation Exercises** can be provided to reinforce the use of relaxation techniques and can be found in **Appendix E**.

Adult/ Caregiver/ Adolescent	<p>Inhale slowly (one-thousand one; one-thousand two; one-thousand three) through your nose and comfortably fill your lungs all the way down to your belly.</p> <p>Silently and gently say to yourself, "My body is filling with calm." Exhale slowly (one-thousand one, one-thousand two, one-thousand three) through your mouth and comfortably empty your lungs all the way down to your abdomen.</p> <p>Silently and gently say to yourself, "My body is releasing tension."</p> <p>Repeat five times slowly and comfortably.</p>
Child	<p>Let's practice a different way of breathing that can help calm our bodies down. Put one hand on your stomach, like this [demonstrate]. Okay, we are going to breathe in through our noses. When we breathe in, we are going to fill up with a lot of air and our stomachs are going to stick out like this [demonstrate].</p> <p>Then, we will breathe out through our mouths. When we breathe out, our stomachs are going to suck in and up like this [demonstrate].</p> <p>We are going to breathe in really slowly while I count to three. I'm also going to count to three while we breathe out really slowly. Let's try it together. Great job!</p>

Engaging ways to practice deep breathing:

- Blow bubbles with a bubble wand and dish soap
- Blow bubbles with chewing gum
- Blow paper wads or cotton balls across the table – make a game of it!

## For Parents or Caregivers, Review Special Considerations for Children

For parents or caregivers, **Handouts: Tips for Helping Preschool Children; Tips for Helping School Age Children; and Tips for Helping Adolescents** provide specific information about age-related reactions, and strategies for addressing these to assist in children's recovery. They address children 5 years old and younger, children 6-12, and adolescents. These information sheets should be provided to parents or caretakers for their use over the next weeks and months. These handouts can be found in **Appendix E**.

Establishing family routines *to the extent possible* after a disaster is important for family recovery. It is especially important to encourage parents and caregivers to try to maintain family routines such as meal times, bedtime, wake time, reading time, and play time. This can be done in a shelter or transitional housing.

Encourage youth and family members to pay special attention to taking care of their physical health. This includes getting enough sleep, proper nutrition (including fluid intake), proper exercise, good hygiene, and setting aside time for enjoyable activities.

It is especially important to assist family members in developing a mutual understanding of their different experiences, reactions and course of recovery, and to help develop a family plan for communicating about these differences. For example, a provider might say:

Adult/ Caregiver	Often, due to differences in their experiences during and after a disaster, family members will have different reactions and different courses of recovery. These differences can be difficult for family members to deal with, and can lead to difficulties like not feeling understood, getting into arguments, or not supporting each other. For example, one family member may be more troubled by a trauma or loss reminder than other family members.
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The Psychological First Aid provider should encourage family members to be understanding, patient, and tolerant of differences in their reactions, and to talk about things that are bothering them so the others will know when and how to support them. People can support and help each other in a number of ways, like listening and trying to understand, comforting with a hug, doing something thoughtful like writing a note, or getting their mind off things by playing a game. Parents need to pay special attention to how their children may be troubled by reminders and hardships because they can strongly affect how their children appear and behave. For example, a child may look like he is having a temper tantrum when actually he has been reminded of a friend who was hurt or killed.

### ***Assist with Developmental Issues***

Children, adolescents, adults and families go through stages of physical, emotional, cognitive and social development. The many stresses and adversities in the aftermath of a disaster may result in key interruptions, delays or reversals in developmental progression. The loss of developmental opportunities or achievements can be experienced as a major consequence resulting from the disaster. Developmental progression is often measured by milestones.

<b>Examples of Developmental Milestones</b>	
Young Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• becoming toilet trained</li> <li>• entering preschool</li> <li>• riding a tricycle</li> </ul>
School Age Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• learning to read and do arithmetic</li> <li>• being able to play by rules in a group of children</li> <li>• handling themselves safely in a widening scope of unsupervised time</li> </ul>
Early Adolescents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• having friends of the opposite sex</li> <li>• pursuing organized extracurricular activities</li> <li>• striving for more independence and activities outside of the home</li> </ul>
Older Adolescents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• learning to drive</li> <li>• getting a first job</li> <li>• dating</li> <li>• going to college</li> </ul>
Adults	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• starting or changing a job or career</li> <li>• getting engaged or married</li> <li>• having a child/having children leave home</li> </ul>
Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• buying a new home or moving</li> <li>• going through a separation or divorce</li> <li>• experiencing the death of a grandparent</li> </ul>
All Ages (Developmental Events)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• graduations</li> <li>• birthdays</li> <li>• special events</li> </ul>

In responding to needs and concerns after a disaster, even though attention will be paid to those that are immediate, children and families should also be given an opportunity to attend to the disaster's impact on development. It can be useful to help children and families identify any of these issues by asking directly.

Parent/ Caregiver	Are there any special events that the family was looking forward to? Was anyone looking forward to doing something important, like starting school, graduating from high school, or entering college?
Adult	Are there any goals you were working towards that this disaster has, or might, interfere with?
Child/ Adolescent	Were there things before the hurricane that you were looking forward to doing? Like a birthday, something fun at school, or going somewhere with a friend.

The Psychological First Aid provider should try to increase appreciation of family members to these issues, so that they understand the challenge to each individual, as well as the whole family. Help find alternative ways for family members to handle the interruption or delay. In helping to develop a plan to help with these concerns, consider whether:

- the event can be postponed to a later date
- the event can be relocated to a different place
- changes in expectations need to take place so that the family members are able to tolerate the postponement
- steps can be taken to put these changes in place

## **Assist with Anger Management**

In post-disaster situations, with stress and adversity, including difficulty sleeping, some individuals may be irritable and have difficulty managing their anger. When appropriate, the Psychological First Aid provider can discuss the following anger management issues.

- Discuss how the anger is affecting the person's life (e.g., relationship with family members and friends, including effects on parenting).
- Normalize the experience of anger, and discuss specifically how anger could increase conflict, push others away, or lead to violence.
- Ask the person to identify changes he/she would like to make.

Some anger management skills that you can suggest include:

- Taking a “time out” or “cool down”
- Reminding yourself that being angry will not help you achieve what you want, and may harm important relationships.
- Increasing exercise or other tension-reducing activities
- Talking to a friend about what's angering you
- Remembering that when you are feeling particularly angry or irritable, have another family member temporarily supervise your children's activities

If anger appears uncontrollable, or leads to violence, seek immediate medical attention, and contact security.

## **Address Highly Negative Emotions (e.g., guilt and shame)**

In the aftermath of disasters, survivors may think about what caused the event, how they reacted, and what the future holds. Some of these beliefs may add to their distress, especially attributing excessive blame to themselves. The Psychological First Aid provider should listen for such negative beliefs, and help survivors to identify alternatives to the negative beliefs that are causing distress. Some questions that can facilitate this process are:

- How else could you look at the situation that would be less upsetting and more helpful? What's another way of thinking about this?
- How might you respond if a good friend was talking to himself/herself like this? What would you say to them? Can you say the same things to yourself?

It may be helpful for the individual to hear that just because he or she *thinks* she is at fault does not mean that this is true. If the individual is receptive, you can offer some alternative ways of looking at the situation. An important role for the Psychological First Aid provider in this effort is to attempt to clarify misunderstandings, rumors, and distortions that exacerbate distress, unwarranted guilt, or shame.

## Help with Sleep Problems

Sleep difficulties are very common following a disaster or other trauma. Ask questions to assess the individual's sleep routines and sleep-related habits. Problem-solve ways of improving sleep, including:

- Go to sleep at the same time and get up at the same time each day
- Reduce alcohol consumption: alcohol disrupts sleep
- Eliminate consumption of caffeinated beverages (e.g., coffee, soft drinks) in the afternoon or evening
- Increase regular exercise, though not too close to bedtime
- Relax before bedtime by doing something calming, like listening to soothing music, or praying.
- Limit daytime naps to 15 minutes and not napping later than 4pm
- Discuss that worry over immediate concerns and exposure to daily reminders can make it more difficult to sleep, and that being able to discuss these and get support from others can improve sleep over time.

## Address Alcohol and Substance Use

When use of alcohol and other substances is a concern:

- Educate the individual regarding the tendency for many people who experience stress reactions to drink or use medications or drugs to reduce their bad feelings.
- Ask the individual to identify what they see as the “pro’s and con’s” of using alcohol or drugs to cope.
- Discuss and mutually agree on abstinence or a safe pattern of use.
- Discuss anticipated difficulties in making change.
- If appropriate and acceptable to the person, make a referral for substance abuse counseling.
- If the individual has previously received treatment for substance abuse, encourage him or her to once again seek treatment to get through the next few weeks and months.

The *Handout: Alcohol and Drug Use after Disasters* gives an overview of this information, and is intended for adults and older adolescents who indicate concerns in this area. This handout can be found in **Appendix E**.

## 8. Linkage with Collaborative Services

**Goal: To in form and link individuals with available services needed at the time or in the future.**

### **Provide Direct Link to Additional Needed Services**

Providing information should be accompanied by a discussion about which of the survivor's needs and current concerns require additional information or services. If the survivor is interested in additional services, do what is necessary to insure effective linkage with those services (e.g., walk the survivor over to an agency representative who can provide a service; set up a meeting with a community representative who may provide appropriate referrals).

When making a referral:

- First summarize your discussion with the person about their needs and concerns
- Check for accuracy of your summary
- Describe the option of referral, including how this may help and what will take place if the individual goes for further help
- Ask about reaction to suggestion of referral
- Give written referral information, or if possible, make an appointment then and there

### **Promote Continuity in Helping Relationships**

A secondary, but important concern for many affected persons is being able to keep in contact with helpers and other persons whom they feel have been or could be helpful as they continue to deal with the immediate situation.

In most cases, continuing contact between affected survivors and you will **not** be possible because the affected persons will leave triage sites or family assistance centers and go to other sites for continuing services. However, contacts made during the acute aftermath of disasters can lead to a sense of abandonment or rejection if the Psychological First Aid provider seems to just “vanish.” Therefore, Psychological First Aid should include the use of strategies for creating a psychological sense of continuity of care, such as:

- Give the name(s) and contact information for the local public health and public mental health service providers in the community. There may also be other local providers or recognized agencies who have volunteered to provide post-disaster follow up services for the community. (Be wary of referring to unknown volunteer providers. ) – Such information may not be known for several hours or days, but once available, it can be considerably helpful to disaster survivors.
- Introduce the survivor to other mental health, health care, family service, or relief workers so that they know several helpers by name rather than only you.

Sometimes, survivors feel as if they are meeting a never-ending succession of helpers, and that they have to go on explaining their situation and telling their story to each one in turn. To the extent possible, this should be minimized. If you are leaving a response site, it is important to let the survivor know this and to ensure a direct “hand-off” to another provider, and if possible, one who will be in a position to maintain an ongoing helping relationship with the person. Orient the new provider to what he or she needs to know about the person, and provide an introduction if at all possible.

Adult/ Caregiver/ Adolescent	“I’ll be here tomorrow and for the rest of the week and will look for you – if you’re here or want to stop by, would you look for me and let me know how you and your family/friends are doing?”
Child	“Thanks for staying with your brother, I know that’s a big help to your parents while they’re figuring out how to make sure you’re all safe. I’ll keep checking on you while I’m here, and if you have a chance and would like to make a drawing that I could keep to remember you, I’d really like that. I’ll try to say goodbye if I have to go.”

# Appendix A: MRC Service Delivery Sites and Settings

## Service Site Challenges in Delivering Psychological First Aid

Medical Reserve Corps members can face many challenges in providing PFA to disaster survivors and relief personnel. These challenges are often related to the specific disaster characteristics (e.g. natural vs. human caused, size, location) and those of the individuals involved (e.g. populations of special consideration-elders, physically challenged, youth, disadvantaged groups, individuals with pre-existing psychiatric illness). Of considerable challenge can be the settings in which medical reserve corps members are assigned. The following information will be helpful in anticipating and understanding the unique challenges of some disaster related service sites.

## General Population Shelters

When it is determined that a community or area of the community must be evacuated because of dangerous or threatening conditions, *General Population Shelters* are opened for the temporary housing of individuals. General Population Shelters are usually located in schools, community and recreation centers, or in other large facilities. Shelters usually have limited space for people to sleep and eat as well as an area for meals to be served. Typical challenges include establishing shelter rules (e.g. lights out, regulated use of showers when in limited supply, feeding hours), addressing the socio-cultural and ethnic issues that arise when bringing diverse populations together, managing public health issues (e.g. sanitation, medication dispensing, isolating the sick) and resolving the inevitable disputes that arise between shelter residents and each other or between shelter residents and staff.

## Respite Centers

*Respite Centers* are locations where first responders can rest and obtain food and clothing and other basic support services. The decision to open a Respite Center is usually determined if there is evidence that prolonged rescue and recovery efforts are necessary. Respite Centers are usually located in close proximity to the direct impact of a disaster. Typical challenges include limited interaction with responders given the usual frenetic pace of the response in the early aftermath of disaster, the urgency on behalf of the responders to continue working, especially if the response is still in the ‘rescue’ mode, and in many cases, the responders need to emotionally ‘distance’ themselves can create significant barriers for MRC personnel in providing PFA activities.

## Hospital-Hospital Emergency Room Settings

During a mass casualty incident, survivors that are triaged on site and listed as “immediate” will be brought to a hospital. In addition, many others will self transport to the hospital wanting to be seen in the Emergency Room. This is likely to create a surge on medical resource capacity. Psychological casualties, as well as medical casualties, may arrive in large numbers, as well as those who have combined psychological and physical symptoms.

One important goal is to facilitate the treatment of injured survivors by removing individuals who do not require immediate medical care from the patient flow. However, increased physical symptoms have frequently been reported after disasters, particularly among those who witness injury and death, and those who may have had toxic exposure to a chemical or biological attack. As a result, differential diagnosis may at times be difficult, since signs and symptoms may be nonspecific and/or status may change over time. News or rumors of such an attack may generate thousands who fear they have been exposed, and rapidly overwhelm the system. Along with a system of triage, hospitals may set up a “support center” where PFA providers can refer those in need to a spectrum of psychological, behavioral and pharmacological interventions.

Depending on the incident or numbers, the Emergency Room may experience a “shut down.” While awaiting bed availability, those who are in need of medical care or who have been decontaminated may be placed in holding areas for observation. These survivors will benefit from Psychological First Aid.

If survivors are admitted to the hospital, the integration of medical care and PFA for medical-surgical casualties is imperative. In addition, family members, friends and co-workers will come to the hospital, some of them searching for missing friends and loved ones, others awaiting news of progress. These individuals may also benefit from PFA.

## **Service Centers**

*Service Centers* may be opened by a local or federal governmental agency or by disaster relief organizations to meet the initial needs of disaster survivors. These centers typically offer assistance with locating temporary housing or providing for the immediate personal needs of disaster survivors, such as food, clothing, and clean-up materials. Depending on the size and magnitude of the disaster, MRC personnel may encounter large numbers of survivors seeking services, anger and frustration expressed by survivors who perceive assistance is not reaching them in a timely or efficient manner, and aggressive or hoarding behaviors in those survivors who perceive inadequate supplies to go around.

## **Emergency Operation Center**

On-going mental health support services may also be requested at the county’s *Emergency Operation Center* (EOC). In the aftermath of a large-scale disaster, the EOC is a chaotic and stressful environment as county, and other organizational disaster planners and managers are preparing the disaster relief response.

## **Community Outreach Teams**

*Community Outreach Teams* are usually established in the event of disasters that affect a large geographic area and/or a significant percentage of the population. These teams are often necessary to avoid long lines at Service Centers or when transportation services for the general population are limited. The teams usually represent two (2) or more individuals that can provide comprehensive services to disaster survivors. For example, a disaster mental health or spiritual care professional may be teamed up with a representative from the American Red Cross who can provide assistance in meeting the survivors’ food, clothing, and shelter needs.

## **Emergency First Aid Stations**

*Emergency First Aid Stations* provide basic medical services to disaster survivors as well as responders who may suffer minor injuries in the rescue and recovery efforts following a disaster. They are usually located in close proximity to the direct impact of a disaster. In the event of a disaster resulting in mass casualties, makeshift emergency first aid stations may be set up in close proximity of your healthcare facility in an effort to relieve the burden of emergency room services and ensure that such high level care is available to the seriously injured.

## **Phone Banks and Hotlines**

Communities and healthcare systems may wish to set up a *Phone Bank* to address and respond to numerous calls with questions that typically arise after a disaster. These Phone Banks are likely to be overwhelmed in the first few hours or days with many questions or concerns regarding such issues as locating missing or injured family members or healthcare concerns or issues. Community hotlines may encounter similar questions and address additional information such as the availability of shelter locations, mass food distribution sites and other disaster relief services.

## **Points of Dispensing (POD) Centers**

PODs might be established by local, state, or federal public health agencies in the event of a public health emergency. These centers may be established to provide mass distribution of medications or vaccinations in an effort to prevent or mitigate the spread of any communicable disease or other public health risk. Healthcare facilities may open PODs with the goal of vaccinating or distributing necessary medications to its own personnel or to reduce the burden on the community POD sites.

## **Volunteer Staging Area**

In the event of large-scale disasters requiring significant volunteer resources, a *Volunteer Staging Area* may be established by a particular disaster relief agency, by a local, state, or federal government agency, or by a healthcare system for its own personnel. Typically, activities in the Volunteer Staging Area include the registering of volunteers for duty and the credentialing of those involved in duties requiring specific skill sets such as mental health or health services. It is important for you to understand that you will be assigned to a service site where you are needed most. While you may have a preference for one site over another, the response needs will require you to be flexible. Survivors and relief personnel are equally important in our response to providing mental health and spiritual care.

## **Family Reception Centers (FRC)**

*Family Reception Centers* are typically opened in the immediate aftermath of a disaster involving mass casualties or fatalities. There is a common recognition that after such disasters, individuals may be trying to locate family or other loved ones specifically involved in the disaster or estranged during the evacuation process. Often these are temporary holding sites until a more structured and operational Family Assistance Center can be opened. Family Reception Centers may be established in close proximity to the immediate disaster scene where individuals arrive in search of family and other loved ones involved in the incident or in healthcare facilities where the injured have been transported.

## **Family Assistance Centers (FAC)**

*Family Assistance Centers* are commonly opened in the event of a disaster involving mass casualties or fatalities. These centers usually offer a range of services in an effort to meet the needs of individuals under these circumstances. Mental health services, spiritual care, catering, and crime victims' services, as well as the services of law enforcement, the medical examiner, disaster relief agencies, and other local, state, and federal agencies are also offered on site. Family Assistance Centers are usually located away from the immediate disaster site, though it is important to note that many times, family members will request visits to the affected site or memorial services will be planned, and thus the FAC should be close enough to facilitate those activities.

## **First Responder and Disaster Relief Personnel Units**

Individuals belonging to First Respond units<sup>3</sup> or other disaster relief response groups may experience a range of reactions as a result of in the aftermath of their disaster response. These reactions do not typically result in severe psychological dysfunction and rarely require extensive mental health intervention. In fact, most reactions will cause minor distress for the individual and will remit over a relatively short period of time. A small minority of workers will require more significant mental health intervention for their reactions, typically administered later in the individual's recovery.

For many first responder units, a mandated (or strongly encouraged or entirely voluntary) group intervention in the aftermath of a disaster or other critical incident has become part of their unit's post-disaster routine. Often these group interventions, which focus on the goal of mitigating future psychological distress in those exposed to such events, follow a prescribed, structured process, known as a demobilization, defusing, or a critical incident stress debriefing. On occasion MRC units, or their members, are invited to facilitate these structured group interventions or act as co-facilitators or 'mental health consultants' when internal or external peer group facilitators are used.

Given the MRC's position statement on psychological debriefing and similarly structured interventions that include the detailed recounting of one's disaster experience (see Appendix B), special caution and consideration must be given to these requests for assistance.

All efforts should first be made to support the provision of Psychological First Aid individually to unit members. If a group process is advised, consider using a psychoeducational format. That is, provide group participants with information regarding the common or anticipated stress reactions typically identified in responder groups following disaster and specific methods for engaging stress relief or self-care activities. It is also advisable to provide participants with information that assists them in identifying reactions that may require or necessitate additional mental health assistance and the local mental health resources available to provide such services.

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<sup>3</sup> While traditionally thought of as police, fire, and EMS responders, other individuals or groups may be considered. These include: search and rescue teams, salvage teams, DMORT and medical examiner's staff, DNA and forensic specialists, media personnel, spiritual care providers, hospital personnel, hotel food service and janitorial staff, CERT volunteers, and transportation crews.

# Appendix B: Position Statement and Guidance for MRC Units on Psychological Debriefing

Medical Reserve Corps  
National Disaster Mental Health Work Group  
April 2006

The National MRC Mental Health Work Group has developed this position statement on the use of *psychological debriefing* as an early mental health intervention in the aftermath of disasters. This position statement is intended to assist individual MRC units and the response community in the development of policy and practice as they relate to the provision of acute mental health services for disaster survivors and MRC personnel.

## ***Recommendation:***

*Because of the possibility of psychological harm to individual participants, 'Psychological Debriefing' should NOT be a part of the standard mental health response to crisis and disaster situations.*

*Mandatory or 'required' psychological interventions should not be universally applied to survivors or responders following disaster.*

## **Rationale**

Major controversy has evolved over the use of psychological debriefing as an early intervention strategy for individuals or responders exposed to disasters or other major traumatic events. Additionally, considerable ambiguity surrounding the term 'debriefing' and inconsistencies in how debriefings are conducted have added to this controversy and confusion in the field.

Mental health experts, professional organizations and a number of federal and state task forces have consistently advised and recommended that psychological debriefing not be utilized as a standard early intervention technique.

This has come about, in part, due to research that suggests:

**There is no convincing evidence that psychological debriefing prevents PTSD or other trauma-related mental disorders.<sup>4</sup>**

**Some individuals may be harmed by debriefing, with the "systemic ventilation of feelings" as the potentially most harmful phase.<sup>5</sup>**

**An individual sense of control or mastery is important in (one's) recovery.<sup>6</sup>**

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<sup>4</sup>Kenardy JA, Webster RA, Lewin TJ, Carr VJ, Hazell PL, Carter GL. Stress debriefing and patterns of recovery following a natural disaster. *J Trauma Stress* 1996; 9: 37-4.

<sup>5</sup> Orner RJ, Kent AT, Pfefferbaum BJ, Raphael B, and Watson PJ. (2006). The Context of Providing Immediate Postevent Intervention. In: EC Ritchie, PJ Watson, & MJ Friedman (eds.), *Interventions Following Mass Violence and Disasters*. New York: The Guilford Press.

<sup>6</sup> Watson P, Ritchie EC, Demer J, Bartone P, Pfefferbaum BJ. (2006). Improving Resilience Trajectories Following Mass Violence and Disaster. In: EC Ritchie, PJ Watson, & MJ Friedman (eds.), *Interventions Following Mass Violence and Disasters*. New York: The Guilford Press.

## Background

The Medical Reserve Corps (MRC), as one of the newest organizations in the disaster response community, has evolved rapidly since its creation in 2002, by the Office of the Surgeon General, United States Public Health Service (USPHS). With more than 400 individual units and over 70,000 members, MRCs have become a prominent vehicle for pre-registering, credentialing and training health (and mental health) professional volunteers in disaster response.

As the MRC program evolved, it became evident that individual MRC units were seeking assistance in interpreting best practices and developing response guidelines across a host of operational areas. In response, the MRC National Program Director, Commander Robert Tosatto, USPHS, initiated several work groups to help identify some common guidelines and policy objectives for MRC units to consider, while at the same time respecting the local autonomy of each individual unit. One of these focus areas is Disaster Mental Health.

The MRC Mental Health Work Group was convened to provide guidance to local MRC units specifically in the areas of disaster mental health where to date, no standard approach exists and response strategies remain unclear. Upon examination of the field the MRC Mental Health Work Group identified a host of issues pertinent to MRC policy and field operations that need to be addressed. These issues include:

- establishing professional core competencies to insure a consistent, well-trained workforce;
- identifying existing training curricula or developing new curricula that embrace these competencies;
- identifying and resolving gaps in service delivery;
- clarifying and resolving controversies related to the provision of MRC-related disaster mental health interventions in the field.

While each of the above issues is critical to establishing a highly skilled volunteer workforce, most at issue is the current controversy surrounding psychological debriefing.

## Overview and Clarification of the Term Debriefing

Debriefing as a concept has evolved over the years into an ambiguous term. Even among emergency services and disaster operations personnel, there is *no uniform application* of the term. It is extremely important to understand these different meanings to ensure that we are communicating the correct message and providing appropriate care to those exposed to traumatic events, including victims, their families and response personnel.

*Operational debriefing* is an organizational process and is *not* considered a psychological intervention. An operational debriefing is typically implemented shortly after a major event or training exercise to review the process of the response and identify successes and failures of the activity.

The primary intent of *operational debriefing* is to gather information about an event for leadership and to convey important “lessons learned” to the participants. Operational debriefings also allow the opportunity to problem-solve current response needs and identify potential sources of support for response personnel. The operational debriefing process has been used extensively by military and civilian agencies for intelligence gathering and informational purposes, providing an evaluative or quality improvement component to response activities and field operations.

“*Operational debriefing*, in first responder settings, **is not a psychological intervention** but a collection of shared information (minus emotional processing), and may be helpful in allowing the

construction of a more coherent, shared narrative of the incident among those who have worked together or have a shared support system,<sup>7</sup>.

*Psychological Debriefing* is a technique of early intervention employed after a traumatic event with the intent of helping an individual process the event and its linked emotional content. One of the more commonly used *psychological debriefing* techniques is Critical Incident Stress Debriefing (CISD). CISD, a component of Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM), has been widely embraced by first responder populations (police, fire, and EMS) as a mechanism for supporting personnel in the aftermath of potentially psychologically distressing events.

In 2001 the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) convened a group of disaster mental health experts to explore the efficacy of early psychological interventions and attempt to clarify the controversy surrounding *psychological debriefing*. These consensus findings were also intended to provide some guidance for the provision of mental health intervention in the early aftermath of mass violence and other disasters. The group's findings in relation to debriefing were as follows:

*There is **some** Level 1 evidence (Level 1 evidence is considered the most reliable type of evidence in most cases) suggesting that early intervention in the form of **a single one-on-one recital of events and expression of emotions** evoked by a traumatic event (as advocated in **some forms** of psychological debriefing) **does not consistently reduce risks** of later developing PTSD or related adjustment difficulties.*

*Some survivors (e.g., those with high arousal) may be put **at heightened risk for adverse outcomes** as a result of such early interventions<sup>8</sup>.*

Over the past five years mental health experts have continued to review the literature on the efficacy of psychological debriefing and have found similar conclusions. Ørner, Kent, Pfefferbaum, Raphael, and Watson, reaffirmed the NIMH psychological debriefing findings and stated:

*There is currently no empirical evidence to support any intervention that utilizes components of trauma remembrance and emotional processing in the early phases following mass violence....*

*The most positive results from early interventions are usually for those that mobilize community support and address survivors' human affiliation needs (e.g. helping survivors establish contact with relatives) rather than interventions that focus on individual psychological reactions.<sup>9</sup>*

## Summary and Recommendations

It is becoming clear across all emergency and disaster mental health disciplines--there is no "one size fits all" approach to addressing and responding to the mental health consequences of disasters. It is

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<sup>7</sup> Ørner RJ, Kent AT, Pfefferbaum BJ, Raphael B, and Watson PJ. (2006). The Context of Providing Immediate Postevent Intervention. In: EC Ritchie, PJ Watson, & MJ Friedman (eds.), *Interventions Following Mass Violence and Disasters*. New York: The Guilford Press.

<sup>8</sup> National Institute of Mental Health (2002). *Mental Health and Mass Violence: Evidence-Based Early Psychological Intervention for Victims/Survivors of Mass Violence. A Workshop to Reach Consensus on Best Practices*. NIH Publication No. 02-5138, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office.

<sup>9</sup> Ørner RJ, Kent AT, Pfefferbaum BJ, Raphael B, and Watson PJ. (2006). The Context of Providing Immediate Postevent Intervention. In: EC Ritchie, PJ Watson, & MJ Friedman (eds.), *Interventions Following Mass Violence and Disasters*. New York: The Guilford Press.

critical that those responsible for community planning and response begin to develop an integrated and flexible mental health response plan that is guided by the evidence-- when evidence exists.

Because the findings (cited previously in this Position Statement and those included in the endnotes of this appendix) suggest that *psychological debriefing* does not prevent trauma-related mental health problems and puts some exposed persons at risk of adverse outcomes, it is the recommendation of this work group that *psychological debriefing*, or *techniques that include trauma remembrance and emotional processing*, should *NOT* be part of the routine MRC mental health response to disaster or other crisis situations.

The disaster mental health response begins long before a disaster occurs and should be an integral part of the overall community disaster plan. Ideally, plans will include an early focus on community education, discussions of realistic expectations following events, risk communication methods and content, triage and screening--both on the scene and in hospitals, as well as post-event availability of psychoeducational information, community resilience activities, individual and group crisis counseling and more definitive mental health treatment, when indicated for those more severely affected by disaster.

Further, the responsibility for providing supportive interventions during disaster can and should extend beyond just the mental health professional alone. Educating and training all disaster responders in the concepts of Psychological First Aid (PFA) or other supportive problem-solving and comfort care activities, strengthens the overall disaster response and ensures that those individuals impacted by disaster and its aftermath have a greater opportunity to have their practical and psychosocial needs addressed early on, and as a result, potentially minimize long-term psychological consequences.

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MRC Psychological Debriefing Position Statement Work Group: Jack Herrmann, John Hickey, Edward M. Kantor, Patricia Santucci, James M. Shultz, and Alan Steinberg.

### **Additional Resources**

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# Appendix C: Missing Persons, Bereavement, Death Notification, and Body Identification

The PFA provider may lend support and practical assistance to children, adults and families in the following post-disaster circumstances:

- When a family member or friend is missing
- When a family member or close friend has died
- When death notification is made
- When body identification is requested
- When body recovery is likely to be delayed

***Culture Alert:*** Beliefs and attitudes about death, funerals, and expressions of grief are strongly influenced by family, culture, religious beliefs, and rituals related to mourning. You should inform yourself about cultural norms with the assistance of community cultural leaders who best understand local customs. Even within cultural and religious groups, belief and practices can vary widely. Do not assume that all members of a given group will believe or behave similarly. It is important for families to engage in their own traditions, practices, and rituals to provide mutual support, seek meaning, manage a range of emotional responses and death-related adversities, and honor the death.

## When a Family Member is Missing

Worry about a missing loved one is extremely distressing. Family members may experience a number of different feelings: worry, hope, anger, turmoil, shock, gratitude, or guilt. They may alternate between certainty that the person is alive - even in the face of contradictory evidence - and hopelessness and despair. They may blame authorities for perceived ineptitude or delays. They may also feel vengeful against those that they consider responsible for their presumed loss and may be frustrated by what they consider to be inadequate efforts or resources devoted to locating their missing relative or friend.

An important way that you can assist family members who have a missing relative, friend or neighbor is to help them obtain updated information about the missing person(s). You should be familiar with the local post-disaster system and locations for updated “debriefings,” and methods for connecting/reuniting survivors. If registries or other mechanisms are available, have family members place their own names in the registry, as well as use it to search for missing loved ones. The wait to register or receive new information is filled with anxiety and apprehension.

The PFA provider, if possible, may want to take extra time with survivors worried over a missing family member. Just being there to listen to their hopes and fears, and being honest in giving information and answering questions is often deeply appreciated.

In assisting family members who may be preoccupied with concerns over a missing loved one, the PFA provider should help to insure that care is taken to prevent young children from wandering away in what may be a strange environment. Family members should be encouraged to make sure that they and their children get enough nourishment and sleep.

The PFA provider can review with the family any pre-disaster plans for post-disaster contact, including:

- School or workplace evacuation plans, plans for tracking transport of students or co-workers for medical care, and locations set up for reunification
- Out-of-state telephone numbers to be used by schools, workplaces, or families in case of emergency
- Pre-arranged or likely meeting places (including homes of relatives) families may have established, both within and outside the disaster perimeter

As local cell phones may not operate after a disaster, if available in the setting, help family members gain access to working cellular phones to locate a missing loved one or to contact relatives who may be worried about them.

Some family members may want to leave a safe area to attempt to find or rescue a missing loved one. As this may not be advisable, the PFA provider should know about the current circumstances in the search area. This includes the specific dangers of such a search, needed precautions, and other options, including telling survivors about the efforts of first responders and when updated information may be available. Those who may feel most urgent about leaving a safe area include:

- Adults with missing elderly parents
- Parents/caregivers of missing children
- Adolescents with a missing parent or close friend

It may comfort some family members to keep a small personal item and or photograph of the missing person with them. When it is feasible, this may be encouraged as an alternative to leaving a safe area when it is not advisable. It is helpful to discuss specific concerns they may have (e.g., an elderly parent who recently had hip surgery, or a child who needs special medications) and offer to inform first responder teams.

In some cases, authorities may ask survivors to give information or provide other evidence to help the search. Authorities may have family members file a missing persons report or provide information about when and where the person was last seen, who else was there, and what he or she was wearing. It is best to limit the exposure of younger children to this process.

It can be disturbing and confusing for a child to be present at a caregiver's interview with authorities or to hear adult speculations about what might have happened to the person. Authorities may ask a family member to collect DNA from a loved one's personal effects, for example, hair from a hairbrush. Observing this can also be disturbing to a young child. It is extremely important to reassure children that the family, police, and other experts are doing everything possible to find the missing loved one. In rare cases, a child may need to be interviewed because he/she was the last one to see the person. A mental health or forensic professional trained to interview children should conduct the interview or be present. A supportive family member should always accompany the child. Children should be told about the interview in simple and honest language.

Adolescent/ Child	Uncle Mario is missing. Everyone is working very hard to find out what happened. The police need to ask you some questions. It's okay if you do not remember something. Just tell them that you don't remember. Not remembering something will not hurt (name). Your mom will stay with you while they ask the questions, and I can stay too, if you want. Do you have any questions?
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A very young child may provide more useful information if first asked to draw what he/she remembers and then talk about the picture.

Forensic experts may seek permission to swab the inside of a family member's cheek to match DNA. When DNA must be collected from a family member, usually it is taken from the nearest living maternal-line relative. All efforts are made to avoid collecting DNA from a child. However, if a child is the closest living maternal-line relative, and the family chooses to participate, authorities might need to swab the inside of the child's cheek to collect cells or even take blood. If this must be done, it should: (1) be explained to the child in simple, honest language; (2) be demonstrated on an adult family member; and (3) done gently and slowly, with continuing simple explanations to the child.

In assisting children, adults and families, the PFA provider should repeat and reinforce the information already provided to the family.

### When a Family Member or Close Friend has Died

*Acute Grief Reactions* are likely to be intense and prevalent among those who have suffered the loss of a loved one or close friend: sadness and anger over the loss, guilt or regret over not having been able to prevent the death, provide comfort, or have a proper leave-taking, missing or longing for the deceased, and strong desires for reunion (including dreams of seeing the person again). Grief reactions vary from person to person and in intensity for years after the loss. There is no single “correct” course of grieving. Importantly, personal, family, religious and cultural factors affect the expression and course of grief. Although painful to experience at first, grief reactions are healthy reactions that reflect the significance of the loss. Over time, grief reactions tend to include more pleasant thoughts and activities, such as telling positive stories about a loved one and finding constructive ways to memorialize or remember him/her. Remember that grief puts people at risk for abuse of over-the-counter medications, increased smoking, and consumption of alcohol. Survivors should be made aware of these risks and the importance of self-care and the availability of professional help.

Treating acutely bereaved children and adults with dignity, respect and compassion is the overriding principle. In working with children and families who have experienced the death of a family member or close friend, the PFA provider can communicate the following to adults, caretakers, and children:

- Family members and friends will each have their own special set of reactions.
- No particular way of grieving is right or wrong.
- Do not expect that there is a “normal” period of time for all types of grief.
- Discuss with family members and friends how culture or religious beliefs influence how you grieve, and especially how the rituals may or may not match current feelings of each family member.
- Keep in mind that children may only show their grief for short periods of time each day, and even though they may play or engage in other positive activities, their grief can be just as that of any other family member.
- Young children often need more than one honest and clear talk about death.
- What is most helpful for family members and friends is to respect and understand how each may be experiencing their own course of grief.
- Some children and adolescents will not have words to describe their feelings of grief and may resist talking with others about how they feel.
- For some children, distracting activities will be more calming rather than conversation, e.g.,

drawing, listening to music, reading, etc.

- Some adolescents may wish to be alone. If safe, provide them with some privacy.

**The PFA provider should keep in mind that grief is influenced by: 1) the way that the person died; 2) the kind of supports available from family and friends; 3) prior relationship with the deceased; 4) age and experience with loss; and 5) the felt consequences of the loss for that child, adult or family.**

Someone who has lost a family member or close friend may want to talk about the loved one. The PFA provider should listen carefully—and with sympathy—for what they have experienced. Do not feel that you have to talk a lot. Do not probe. Use the deceased person’s name, rather than referring to him/her as “the deceased.”

***Don’t say:***

- I know how you feel.
- It was probably for the best.
- He is better off now.
- It was her time to go.
- At least he went quickly.
- Let’s talk about something else.
- You should work towards getting over this.
- You are strong enough to deal with this.
- You should be glad s/he passed quickly.
- That which doesn’t kill us makes us stronger.
- You’ll feel better soon.
- You did everything you could.
- You need to grieve.
- You need to relax.
- It’s good that you are alive.
- It’s good that no one else died.
- It could be worse; you still have a brother/sister/mother.
- Everything happens for the best according to a higher plan.
- We are not given more than we can bear.
- (To a child) You are the man/woman of the house now.
- Someday you will have an answer.

If a person who has lost a loved one says any of the above things, you can respectfully *acknowledge* the feeling or thought (for example, “It’s helpful for you to know that he didn’t suffer, even though you really wish he could have survived”). Just don’t *initiate* these statements yourself.

***Do:***

- Reassure grieving individuals that what they are experiencing is understandable and expectable.
- Let them know that they will most likely continue to experience periods of sadness, loneliness or anger.
- Tell them that if they continue to experience feelings of depression beyond three to six months, talking to a member of the clergy or to a counselor who specializes in grief is advisable.
- If they have a prior history of significant depression, let them know that they may wish to consult with someone at even an earlier time.

- Tell them that their doctor should be able to refer them to a counselor. They can also contact their city or county department of mental health or local hospital for a referral to appropriate services.

**Physical Touching:** Many cultures have strict rules about physical space between people, eye contact, and the appropriateness of physical touching, especially of the opposite sex. Until you become familiar with the rules for the culture of the family, you should not approach too closely, make prolonged eye contact, or touch. In working with family members, it is important for the PFA provider to find out who is the spokesperson for the family.

## Talking to Children and Adolescents about Death and Loss

Children’s understanding of death varies depending on age and prior experience and is strongly influenced by family, religious, and cultural values.

- Pre-school children may not understand that death is permanent, and may believe that if they wish it, the person can return. They need help to confirm the physical reality of a person’s death—that he/she is no longer breathing, moving or having feelings—and has no discomfort or pain. They may be concerned about something happening to another family member.
- School-age children may understand the physical reality of death, and think of death as a monster or skeleton. In longing for his/her return, they may experience upsetting feelings of the “ghostlike” presence of the lost person, but not tell anyone.
- Adolescents understand that death is irreversible. Losing a family member or friend can trigger rage and impulsive decisions, (quitting school, running away, or abusing substances). These issues need prompt attention by the family or school.

**Losing a parent or guardian affects children differently depending on their age. When a toddler loses a parent/caregiver, he/she needs consistent care and a predictable daily routine as soon as possible. Toddlers are easily upset by change: food prepared differently, their special blanket missing, or being put into bed at night without the usual person or in a different way. Caregivers (including the surviving parent) should ask the child if they are doing something differently or something “wrong,” (e.g., Am I not doing this the way Mommy did?). A school-age child loses not only their primary caretaker, but also loses the person who would normally be there to comfort him/her and help with daily activities. Other caretakers should try, as best they can, to assume these roles. Children may be angry at a substitute caregiver, especially when disciplined. Caregivers should acknowledge that the child is missing his family member or friend, and then provide extra comfort. A teenager whose parent, sibling, or close friend has died may have an intense sense of unfairness, and protest over the loss. They may have to take on greater responsibilities within their family, and resent not being able to have more independence. Over time, caregivers should discuss with teens how to balance these different needs.**

When assisting parents in talking with their children about death, keep the following in mind:

- Be at the child’s eye level when talking with them.
- Assure children that they are loved and will be cared for.
- Watch for signs that the child may be ready to talk about what happened.
- Do not make the child feel guilty or embarrassed about wanting to talk.

- Do not push children to talk.
- Give short, simple and honest age-appropriate answers to their questions.
- Listen carefully to their feelings without judgment.
- Reassure them that they did not cause the death, and that it was not a punishment for anything that anyone did “wrong.”
- Answer questions honestly about funerals, burial, prayer, and other rituals.
- Be prepared to discuss the same things again and again.
- Do not be afraid to say that you don’t know the answer to a question.

The PFA provider should give information to parents/caretakers and children about reactions they might experience. Children’s overt reactions to the loss may be intense and immediate, or appear only after several days or weeks. Clarifying that each family member should be sensitive to each other’s unique experience of grief, and that some may need special attention. Families should know that remembering and reminiscing are, and will be an important part of grieving.

When speaking to parents/caretakers, the PFA provider can say:

Parent/ Caregiver	“Although feelings about the loss may be there all the time, there may be moments when you feel it very strongly. Some of these moments everyone will share in common, and it is a good time to give each other extra support and comfort. Some of these moments will be very private for each family member. It is okay to take some time for yourself, but it is often good to let others in the family know when this happens and how they can be of help.”
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The PFA provider can also add:

Parent/ Caregiver	<p>“It can be helpful to think about times when your children will particularly miss their family member, like at mealtime or bedtime. If you say something like, ‘It is hard not to have daddy here with us right now,’ you can ease the discomfort everyone is feeling, make children feel less alone, and help them to better handle these difficult times.”</p> <p>“When you see a sudden change in your child—looking kind of lost or sad or even angry—and you suspect he/she is missing the family member, let him/her know that you, too, have times when you feel that way. Say something like, ‘You seem really sad, I’m wondering if you are thinking about your dad. Sometimes I feel very sad about dad too. It’s ok to tell me when you are feeling bad so maybe I can help.’ Help by giving them some time alone with those feelings, sitting quietly with them, and giving them a hug.”</p>
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Let family members know that there may be differences in how much each wants to talk about the lost loved one. You can say:

Adult/ Adolescent	“Each of you may have different ways to deal with the death right now. Sometimes you will want to talk about person. Other times you will feel like being by yourself and quiet. Family members need to respect what each is feeling so that you do not get upset with each other over differences in how each family member is responding.”
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Children and adolescents sometimes feel guilty that they have survived while other family members

have not. They may believe that they caused the death in some way. Families need to help dispel children's sense of responsibility, and assure them that in events like this, they are not to blame for what happened. For example, you may suggest that a caregiver say:

Parent to Adolescent/Child	“We all did what we could to try to save everybody. Daddy would be so happy that we are all okay. You did not do anything wrong.”
	Saying this once may not be enough; feelings of guilt may come up again and again, and caretakers need to be able to provide constant assistance with the child's ongoing worries and confusion about guilt.

In the immediate aftermath of loss of a loved one, encourage family members to rely on one another for comfort in the weeks and months ahead.

### *Grief and Spiritual Issues*

**Many times during disaster situations, well-meaning religious people seek out survivors in order to proclaim their own religious beliefs about salvation or damnation. If you become aware of activities like this, do not try to intervene; instead notify security personnel or others in charge.**

In order to assist families with spiritual needs, the PFA provider should become familiar with clergy who may be part of the disaster response team on-site, and ways to obtain contact information for clergy of local religious groups that you can use for referral purposes.

It is common for families to rely on religious and spiritual beliefs/practices as a way to cope with traumatic events. Survivors may use religious language to talk about what is happening or want to engage in prayer or other religious practices. It is not necessary for the PFA provider to share these beliefs in order to be supportive. You are not required to do or say anything that violates your own beliefs. Often, simply listening and attending is all that is required. Things to keep in mind include:

- A good way to broach this topic is to ask, “Do you have any religious or spiritual needs at this time?” This question is not meant to lead to a theological discussion or to the PFA provider engaging in spiritual counseling. If requested, you can refer them to a pastoral care professional or offer to call a clergyperson or chaplain of their choice.
- Do not contradict or try to “correct” what a person says about their religious beliefs, even if you disagree and think that it may be causing them distress.
- Do not try to answer religious questions like, “Why was this allowed to happen?” These questions represent expressions of emotion rather than real requests for an answer. Often listening and attending is enough and all that is required.
- Do not be drawn into a discussion of religion or put forth your own religious views (i.e., “Everything happens for the best according to a higher plan.”).
- If a person is clearly religious, ask if he/she wants to see a clergy member of their faith. Do not assume that a person wants to see a clergy person.
- Many people rely on religious objects such as prayer beads, statues, or sacred texts that they may have lost or left behind. Locating an object like this can help to increase their level of security and sense of control. A local clergy person can be of help in providing these items.
- Survivors may want to pray alone or in a group. You may help by finding a suitable place for them to do so. For some people, facing in the proper direction while praying is important. You can help to orient them.
- You may also provide information to officials in charge regarding space and religious items

needed for religious observances.

- If you are asked to join in prayer, you may decline if you feel uncomfortable. Keep in mind that joining may only involve standing in silence while they pray. If you are comfortable joining in at the end with an “Amen,” this can help your relationship with the person and the family.
- Many people routinely light candles or incense when they pray. If not allowed in the setting, explain this to the person, and assist them in finding a nearby place where an open flame would be allowed.
- Some people believe in miracles. A survivor may voice hope for a miracle, even in the face of virtual certainty that their loved one has died. Do not take this as evidence that he/she has lost touch reality or has not heard what has been said, but the survivor’s way of continuing to function in devastating circumstances.
- Every religion has specific practices around death, particularly in regard to the care of dead bodies. Ask survivors about their religious needs in this area. They may want a clergy person to advise them.
- In some cultures, expressions of grief can be very loud and may seem out of control. It may be helpful to move families to a more private space to prevent them from upsetting others. If the behavior is upsetting to you, you should find someone else to assist the family.

If a survivor expresses anger associated with his/her religious beliefs (a sign of spiritual distress) do not judge or argue with him/her. Most people are not looking for an “answer,” but a willing, non-judgmental listener. If spiritual concerns are contributing to significant distress, guilt or functional impairment, you can ask if he/she would like a referral to a pastoral counselor.

### ***Casket and Funeral Issues***

Local laws often govern the preparation of a body for burial and rules regarding caskets or interment. Sometimes exceptions are made for members of particular religious groups. In many jurisdictions, the law requires autopsies for any victim of a traumatic death or when the cause of death is not clear. This requirement may be upsetting, especially to members of religious groups that normally prohibit autopsies. In some jurisdictions, autopsy requirements can be waived by a Medical Examiner. Families who do not want an autopsy should be helped to find out about the local law.

When a body has been significantly disfigured, you may suggest that—if it is in keeping with the religious tradition of the family—survivors place a photograph of the deceased on the casket in order to allow mourners to remember the person and pay their respects.

### ***Children’s Attendance at a Funeral***

The PFA provider can assist family members with their questions about whether children should attend the funeral, memorial service, or gravesite. In responding to questions, keep the following in mind:

- It can be helpful to a child to attend a funeral. Even if emotionally challenging, funerals help children accept the physical reality of the death that is part of grieving. If not offered to be included, children can feel left out of something important to the family.
- Parents/caregivers should give children a choice as to whether they want to attend. They may encourage, but not pressure them.
  - Before asking them to choose, tell them what to expect if they attend, including letting them know that adults may be upset and crying. Explain that there will be a special area for the family if that is to be arranged. Let them know about things that will happen during the service.
  - Give them an opportunity to help choose a person they feel close to, who can pay

- appropriate attention to them during the service.
- Always provide children a way to leave with that person, even temporarily, if the event becomes overwhelming.
- Tell children about alternative arrangements if they do not wish to attend, for example that they can stay with a neighbor or friend of the family.
- If they chose not to attend, offer to say something or read something on their behalf, and explain how they can participate in a memorial activity at a later time.
- If possible, bring younger children to the location early so that they can explore the space. Describe the casket and, if they wish, join them in approaching it. Caution should be exercised in regard to allowing young children to view or touch the body. A young child can use a photograph of the person to help them say goodbye.
- For younger children, reinforce that the family member is not in distress.

The PFA provider may be asked to attend funerals or events. You may feel that in attending, you can further assist a family member or child.

## Traumatic Grief

**Alert: Disaster survivors, who have experienced extreme life threat or witnessed the death of their loved one, can become preoccupied with traumatic details of how the person died. This preoccupation, which has been referred to as Traumatic Grief, can change the course of bereavement. Survivors with traumatic grief may not appear to be acutely grieving, but do not confuse a lack of crying or sadness with not caring. Help family members understand that each of them will experience his/her own type—and course—of grief reactions depending on the experience of the disaster and the death. Do not delve into the traumatic details of the death, but instead, inform family members that different types of disaster-related experiences can affect grief. The PFA provider can help to promote a family milieu of understanding and tolerance that helps to avoid conflict and estrangement.**

After traumatic death, survivors tend to stay focused on the circumstances of the death, including being preoccupied with how the loss could have been prevented, what the last moments were like, and who was at fault. Traumatic grief reactions include:

- Intrusive, disturbing images of the manner of death that interfere with positive remembering and reminiscing
- Delay in the onset of healthy grief reactions
- Retreat from close relationships with family and friends
- Avoidance of usual activities because they are reminders of the traumatic loss

Traumatic grief changes mourning, often putting individuals on a different time course than may be expected or experienced by other family members. Traumatic grief reactions can clash with the timing of religious rituals and other cultural expressions of mourning. To address issues of traumatic grief with a family, the PFA provider might say:

Adult/ Adolescent	“It is important to know that what each of you experienced during the disaster may affect how you express your grief. Some of you may not be able to cry, while others might cry a lot. You should not feel badly about this or think there is something wrong with you. Each of you will feel your
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	loss differently. What is most important is to respect the different ways each of you will feel or show your grief and help each other in the days and weeks ahead.”
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You may want to speak privately to a family member who was present at the time of the death in order to advise them about the extra burden of witnessing the death. Let him/her know that talking to a mental health professional or clergy may be very helpful. For example, the provider might say:

Adult/ Adolescent	“It is awful to have been there when Joe died. Other family members may want to know details about what happened, but there may be some details that you think will be too upsetting for them. Discussing what you went through with a professional can help you decide what to share with your family and also help you with your grief.”
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## **Death Notification**

Although it is unlikely that the PFA provider will be asked to notify a family member of a death, the PFA provider may assist family members who have been informed of the high probability, or confirmation, of a death. The PFA provider may be asked by police, FBI, hospital personnel or D-Mort team members to be present at the time of death notification. You should be aware that in some catastrophic situations, for example airline crashes, the news media may report that there were no survivors of the accident. This news is often released before family members have been officially notified that a relative has died. Sometimes incorrect information is circulated by the media or other survivors—caution family members to wait for official confirmation from the authorities.

After learning of the death of a family member or close friend, people may have psychological and physiological reactions that vary from hyperarousal to numbness. At the same time, they must cope with the continuing stress of still being in the disaster environment. In providing support, the PFA provider should keep the following in mind.

- Don’t rush. Family members need time to process the news and to ask questions.
- Allow for initial strong reactions to horrible news concerning the sudden death of a loved one. Consider these to be normal reactions to a highly abnormal situation, and expect that they will recede over time. If medically necessary, ask for assistance from an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT). If family members become highly agitated, get help from authorities to protect them from hurting themselves or others. Family and friends are critical in these intense situations. Prior to, during and after death notification, the PFA provider should try to assure that these social supports are in place.
- Try to work with individuals and small family units. Even when officials are addressing large crowds, it is better to have family members assembled at their own tables with the PFA provider present. Potentially traumatic activities —such as reviewing passenger manifests, ticket lifts, morgue photos, etc.—should be done in small family groups, in a private location, with the appropriate authorities, and a PFA provider present.
- There may be a need for immediate decision-making or action following the tragic news. The PFA provider can assist family members in clarifying what needs to be done, and what options are available. Getting accurate information is crucial. Those who have been traumatized and are acutely bereaved may have difficulty in recalling information. Help family members by restating information as needed.
- When talking about a person who is a confirmed fatality, use the word “died”, not “lost” or “passed away.”

- Remember that family members do not want to know how you feel (sympathy); they want to know you are trying to understand how THEY feel (empathy).
- If you go with family members to a hospital emergency department, ICU or morgue, prepare them for what they are going to see, hear, smell, etc. If you have already established a supportive relationship with the family, accompanying them can help them cope with the immediate trauma as well as assist them with other tasks to come.
- If possible, try to have the most physically and emotionally stable family member make a body identification, or assist family members who must make the identification.
- Encourage the family to minimize children’s exposure to any photographs, artifacts, or remains of the deceased.

## **Body Identification**

When bodies or partial remains have been recovered, family members may be asked to gather medical records, x-rays, dental records and articles containing the relative’s DNA (a hair brush, tooth brush etc.) and bring them to a designated location. Under such circumstances, family members may be asked for a sample of their DNA (usually obtained by swabbing the lining of the cheek) provided at a location established for this purpose. A mental health responder is usually present at these DNA stations.

Where identifiable bodies have been recovered and family members have been asked to assist in the identification process, authorities may take family members to a private location to view photographs of persons who have been brought to the morgue. Once a person is tentatively recognized by photo, a family member may be asked to view the body in the morgue. The body may be behind a glass partition, mostly covered by a sheet. If the relative has died in the hospital, identification may be made at a designated location in the hospital. Many forensic authorities try to reduce the traumatic effect of seeing a loved one’s body in the morgue by using a videotape or still photographs. This also protects family members from the strong odor, which can be highly disturbing.

Some may feel that they must see the body before they can accept that the person is dead. Adolescents and older children might ask to be present when the body is identified; however, in most cases, mental health professionals discourage allowing children to be present. Children may not understand the extent to which the body has deteriorated or changed and may find seeing the body extremely disturbing. This can be upsetting for adults as well. Parents can say to the child:

Parent to Adolescent/Child	“You know, Uncle Bobby wouldn’t want you to see him that way. He’d want you to remember him looking alive and healthy. I’m going to go and make sure that it’s him, but I don’t feel you should go and see the body.”
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When the body found is too disfigured for family members to be able to identify it, it is natural for families to want to know when and where the body was found, and what the person experienced before dying. Family members may be more disturbed by the unanswered questions, than by having those questions answered.

**The physical confirmation of the death can provoke a range of grief reactions, including shock, numbness, fainting, vomiting, trembling, screaming, or hitting something or someone. Some individuals may be unresponsive, while others may become outraged, cursing about how the person died. You should expect a wide range of reactions, many of which will be quite brief.**

## Confirming Body Identification to a Child or Adolescent

After a family member has identified the body of a loved one, a parent or closely related caregiver should convey this to related children. You may sit in to provide support and assistance. Since young children don't understand that death is final, a family member should make it very clear that the missing loved one's body has been found, and that he/she is dead. If the identification was made through forensic methods, it is important to explain the certainty of the identification in simple direct language. The family's belief about death and an afterlife will often be part of this conversation. Parents should reassure the child that the loved one is not suffering, that the child was very loved by him/her, and that the child will be taken care of. Allow the child to ask questions, and—if an answer is not readily available—let him/her know that the parent or PFA provider will try to get some additional information. The PFA provider should caution parents or caretakers about giving disturbing details of the physical appearance of the body. If the child asks about the appearance, a parent can say:

Parent to Adolescent/Child	“It was not easy to see Uncle Jack, and he would want us to remember him alive, and to think about the nice times we spent together. I remember going on hikes and going fishing. You can pick any memory of Uncle Jack that you want to, too. Then we'll both have good ways to think about him.”
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Young children may have a range of responses to being told of the death. They may act as if they did not hear; they may cry or protest the news. They may be angry with the person who told them of the death. Children need a comforting presence, reassurance that the loved one is not physically suffering, and confirmation that they were loved. The PFA provider may suggest that the parent or caretaker to say something like:

Parent to Adolescent/Child	“It is awfully hard to hear that Aunt Julia is really dead. It's okay if you want to cry or if you don't want to cry. Anytime you want to talk about her and what happened, I'm going to be here for that. You'll see me have lots of feelings too. Don't be worried; we can all help each other.”
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Family members should address children's immediate questions about their living circumstances and who will take care of them. In assisting, the PFA provider may suggest that separation of siblings be avoided, if at all possible.

The PFA provider can help parents or other family members talk with their adolescent children. Parents should be told that, after experiencing a traumatic loss, it is important to caution teens about doing something risky, like storming off, driving while overwhelmed with such news, staying out late, being tempted to use alcohol or other drugs, or acting in some other reckless way. Parents or caretakers should also understand that an adolescent's anger can turn to rage over the loss, and they should be prepared to tolerate some amount of expression of rage. However, they should also be firm in addressing any behavioral risks. Expression of any suicidal thought should be taken seriously, and appropriate additional assistance should be immediately sought. Expressions of revenge should also be taken seriously. Adolescents should be cautioned to think about the consequences of revenge, and be encouraged to consider different constructive ways to respond to their feelings.

**The process leading to the confirmation of a relative's sudden death is extremely intense and challenging. Psychological, social and practical support in these situations is critical. In these circumstances, the PFA provider should take cues**

**from the family in regard to how they wish to spend this time. They may want to sit in silence, pray, read sacred text, or distract themselves by talking about totally unrelated matters. Distracting activities like games or talking about lighter subjects can be an adaptive way of not focusing on their grief.**

### ***When a Child has seen a Dead Body (Outside of a Ritual Setting)***

In the case of terrorism and disaster, children are sometimes exposed to dead bodies of strangers or of their loved ones. Parents/caretakers should be encouraged to explain to a child why a dead body looks different from a living person. For example, a body that has been submerged under water looks bloated and discolored. If not explained, the child may come to his/her own even more disturbing conclusions.

### **When Body Recovery is Delayed**

Sometimes days or weeks after a person has disappeared with no recovery of the body, the evidence will strongly suggest that the person is dead. Parents/caregivers should not assume that it is better for a child to keep hoping that the person is alive, but instead honestly share this information with the child. Parents should explain to the child, without providing too much detail, that it looks like the loved one has died, and that this is what you and the authorities believe has happened.

**In some religious and cultural groups, mourning or moving on with life is prohibited until a body is recovered and a funeral held. This practice can cause difficulties for families where the recovery of the body is delayed or never occurs. When the recovery of the body is seriously delayed for a family with these beliefs, the PFA provider should assist the family in consulting with their religious leader.**

**Not being able to perform burial and other religious rituals can complicate the grief process and increase a family's distress. When there is no body to bury, it is important for families and communities to create other kinds of rituals or memorial observances. Having a place to visit that memorializes their loved one is often comforting to families. Parents should include children in these rituals.**

# Appendix D: Resources<sup>10</sup>

## Training Resources

### **Advanced Disaster Medical Response: A Manual for Providers**

Briggs, S.M., & Brinsfield, K.H., (editors). Harvard Medical International, Inc., 2003.  
<http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0972377204/002-8489036-2108026?v=glance&n=283155>

### **Behavioral Health Awareness Training for Terrorism and Disasters**

Shultz JM, Espinel Z, Cohen RE, Shaw JA, Flynn BW, Ursano RJ.  
Center for Disaster Epidemiology & Emergency Preparedness (DEEP Center), University of Miami School of Medicine, 2005 (first edition 2003).  
<http://deep.med.miami.edu>

### **Community-based Psychological Support: A Training Manual**

Published by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2003.  
<http://www.ifrc.org/what/health/psycholog/manual.asp>

### **Disaster Behavioral Health: All Hazards Training**

Shultz JM, Espinel Z, Cohen RE, Smith RG, Flynn BW.  
Center for Disaster Epidemiology & Emergency Preparedness (DEEP Center), University of Miami School of Medicine, 2006.  
<http://deep.med.miami.edu>

### **Disaster Behavioral Health OPERATIONS Training for Health Care Professionals**

Shultz JM, Espinel Z, Cohen RE, Shaw JA, Flynn BW, Watson PJ, Hick JL, Schreiber M.  
Center for Disaster Epidemiology & Emergency Preparedness (DEEP Center), University of Miami School of Medicine, 2005.  
<http://deep.med.miami.edu>

### **Disaster Mental Health: A Critical Response. A Training for Mental Health Professionals in Community Settings**

Herrmann, J. University of Rochester. 2005  
[http://www.centerfordisastermedicine.org/community\\_setting/](http://www.centerfordisastermedicine.org/community_setting/)

### **Disaster Mental Health: A Critical Response. A Training for Mental Health and Spiritual Care Professionals in Healthcare Settings**

Herrmann, J. University of Rochester. 2006  
[http://www.centerfordisastermedicine.org/healthcare\\_setting/](http://www.centerfordisastermedicine.org/healthcare_setting/)

### **Disaster Mental Health Training: Guidelines, Considerations, and Recommendations**

Young, B.H., Ruzek, J.I., Wong, M., Salzer, M.S., and Naturale, A.J. In *Interventions Following Mass Violence and Disasters: Strategies for Mental Health Practice*. Edited by Elspeth Cameron Ritchie, Patricia J. Watson, and Matthew J. Friedman. New York: Guilford Publications, 2006.  
<http://www.istss.org/guilfordDMH.pdf>

### **Disaster Mental Health Response Handbook: An Educational Resource for Mental Health Professionals Involved in Disaster Management**

Centre for Mental Health, NSW Health and NSW Institute of Psychiatry. New South Wales, Australia State Health Publication No: (CMH) 00145, 2000.  
[http://www.nswiop.nsw.edu.au/Resources/Disaster\\_Handbook.pdf](http://www.nswiop.nsw.edu.au/Resources/Disaster_Handbook.pdf)

### **Disaster Mental Health Services: A Guidebook for Clinicians and Administrators**

Young, B.H., Ford, J.D., Ruzek, J.I., Friedman, M.J., & Gusman, F.D. The National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Education & Clinical Laboratory, VA Palo Alto Health Care System, Menlo Park, California 94025; Executive Division, VA Medical & Regional Office Center, , White River Junction, Vermont 05009, 1998.  
<http://www.ncptsd.va.gov/publications/disaster/>

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<sup>10</sup> Adapted from: Herrmann J. *Disaster Mental Health: A Critical Response. A Training Curriculum for Mental Health and Spiritual Care Professionals in Healthcare Settings*. University of Rochester, 2006.

### **Field Manual for Mental Health and Human Service Workers in Major Disasters**

DeWolfe, D. J. (author). Nordboe, D. (editor). Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Center for Mental Health Services DHHS Publication No. ADM 90-537, 2000.

<http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/ADM90-537/Default.asp>

### **Grief Counseling Resource Guide**

Published by the New York State Office of Mental Health (OMH), 2004.

<http://www.omh.state.ny.us/omhweb/grief/>

### **Helping to Heal: A Training on Mental Health Response to Terrorism Manual (2004)**

Community Resilience Project of Northern Virginia. Commonwealth of Virginia Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse Services, January 2004.

<http://www.dmhmrzas.virginia.gov/CWD-HelpingToHeal.htm>

### **Mental Health Response to Mass Violence and Terrorism: A Training Manual**

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. DHHS Pub. No. SMA 3959. Rockville, MD: Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2004.

<http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/media/ken/pdf/SMA-3959/MassViolenceAndTerrorism.pdf>

### **National Disaster Mental Health Training Program**

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (NCPTSD)

[http://www.ncptsd.org/about/training/ndmh\\_training.html](http://www.ncptsd.org/about/training/ndmh_training.html)

### **Psychological First Aid: A Field Operation Guide**

Terrorism and Disaster Branch, National Child Traumatic Stress Network, National Center for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. 2005

<http://www.ncptsd.va.gov/pfa/PFA.html>

### **Psychological Intervention for Victims of Mass Terrorism and Trauma**

Buetler, L. National Center on the Psychology of Terrorism, Pacific Graduate School of Psychology.

<http://www.terrorismpsychology.org>

### **SURGE, SORT, SUPPORT: Disaster Behavioral Health Awareness Training for Health Care Professionals**

Shultz JM, Espinel Z, Cohen RE, Smith RG, Flynn BW.

Center for Disaster Epidemiology & Emergency Preparedness (DEEP Center), University of Miami School of Medicine, 2005 (first edition 2004).

<http://deep.med.miami.edu>

### **Training Manual for Mental Health and Human Service Workers in Major Disasters**

DeWolfe, D. J. (author). Nordboe, D. (editor). Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Center for Mental Health Services DHHS Publication No. ADM 90-538, 2000.

<http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/ADM90-538/Default.asp>

### **Triumph Over Tragedy, 2nd Ed. A Community Response to Managing Trauma in Times of Disaster and Terrorism**

Evans, G.D., & Wiens, B.A., (editors). National Rural Behavioral Health Center, Department of Clinical & Health Psychology, P.O. Box 100165, Gainesville, FL 32610, January 2004.

<http://www.nrbhc.org>

## **Issues and Populations of Special Consideration**

### **An ADA Guide for Local Governments: Making Community Emergency Preparedness and Response Programs Accessible to People with Disabilities (2005)**

U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Disability Rights Section

<http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/emergencyprep.htm>

### **Assuring Cultural Competence in Disaster Response**

The Florida Center for Public Health Preparedness

[http://www.fcphp.usf.edu/courses\\_listings.htm](http://www.fcphp.usf.edu/courses_listings.htm)

### **Developing Cultural Competence in Disaster Mental Health Programs: Guiding Principles and Recommendations**

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Developing Cultural Competence in Disaster Mental Health Programs: Guiding Principles and Recommendations. DHHS Pub. No. SMA 3828. Rockville, MD: Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2003.

[http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/media/ken/pdf/SMA03-3828/CulturalCompetence\\_FINALwithcovers.pdf](http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/media/ken/pdf/SMA03-3828/CulturalCompetence_FINALwithcovers.pdf)

### **Disaster Mental Health: Crisis Counseling Programs for the Rural Community (1999)**

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Center for Mental Health Services. DHHS Publication No. SMA 99-3378. Printed in 1999.

<http://www.mentalhealth.org/publications/allpubs/sma99-3378/default.asp>

### **Disaster Preparedness for People with Disabilities**

American Red Cross national headquarters: Disaster Services, Health and Safety, Services, National Office of Volunteers, Office of General Counsel, and Risk, Management Division.

<http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/beprepared/disability.pdf>

### **Helping Children after a Disaster**

American Academy of Child & Adolescent Psychiatry, No. 36. Updated July 2004.

[www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/disaster.htm](http://www.aacap.org/publications/factsfam/disaster.htm)

### **Mental Health Care for Ethnic Minority Individuals and Communities in the Aftermath of Disasters and Mass Violence**

Norris, F.H., & Alegria, M. CNS Spectrums. February 2005. Vol. 10, No. 2. p. 132-140.

[http://www.cnsspectrums.com/pdf/art\\_637.pdf](http://www.cnsspectrums.com/pdf/art_637.pdf)

### **Psychosocial Issues for Children and Families in Disasters: A Guide for the Primary Care Physician**

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Center for Mental Health Services.

<http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/SMA95-3022/default.asp>

### **Psychosocial Issues for Older Adults in Disasters**

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Center for Mental Health Services. DHHS Publication No. ESDRB SMA 99-3323

<http://media.shs.net/ken/pdf/SMA99-3323/99-821.pdf>

## **Disaster Relief Organizations, Agencies and Programs**

### **American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT)**

<http://www.aamft.org>

### **American Mental Health Counselors Association**

<http://www.amhca.org>

### **American Nurses Association**

<http://www.nursingworld.org/news/disaster>

### **American Psychiatric Association**

<http://www.psych.org>

### **American Psychological Association (APA)**

<http://www.apa.org>

### **American Red Cross Disaster Services (ARC)**

<http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster>

### **Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS)**

<http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cmhs>

### **Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)**

<http://www.dhhs.gov>

### **Department of Homeland Security (DHS)**

<http://www.dhs.gov>

### **Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)**

[http://www.va.gov/about\\_va/history](http://www.va.gov/about_va/history)

**Disaster Psychiatry Outreach (DPO)**

<http://www.disasterpsych.org>

**Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)**

<http://www.fema.gov>

**International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies (ISTSS)**

<http://www.istss.org>

**Medical Reserve Corps (MRC)**

<http://www.medicalreservecorps.gov>

**National Association of Social Workers**

<http://www.naswdc.org>

**National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (NCPTSD)**

<http://www.ncptsd.org>

**National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN)**

<http://www.nctsn.org>

**National Disaster Medical System (NDMS)**

<http://www.ndms.dhhs.gov>

**National Organization for Victims Assistance (NOVA)**

<http://www.dhs.gov>

**National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD)**

<http://www.nvoad.org>

**New York Disaster Interfaith Services (NYDIS)**

<http://www.nydis.org>

**New York State Emergency Management Office (SEMO)**

<http://www.nysemo.state.ny.us>

**Office of Victims of Crime (OVC)**

<http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc>

**Project Liberty**

<http://www.projectliberty.state.ny.us>

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)**

<http://www.samhsa.gov>

## **Planning Tools and Technical Resources**

**A Guide to the Disaster Declaration Process and Federal Disaster Assistance**

Department of Homeland Security, Emergency Preparedness and Response Directorate, Office of Legislative Affairs, 202-646-4500.

[http://www.fema.gov/pdf/rrr/dec\\_proc.pdf](http://www.fema.gov/pdf/rrr/dec_proc.pdf)

**An ADA Guide for Local Governments: Making Community Emergency Preparedness and Response Programs Accessible to People with Disabilities**

U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, Disability Rights Section, 2005.

<http://www.usdoj.gov/crt/ada/emergencyprep.htm>

**CDC Public Health Emergency Response Guide for State, Local, and Tribal Public Health Directors**

Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2004.

<http://www.bt.cdc.gov/planning/pdf/cdcreponseguide.pdf>

**Community Guidelines for Developing a Spontaneous Volunteer Plan**

Illinois Terrorism Task Force Committee on Volunteers and Donations

<http://www.illinoishomelandsecurity.org/pdf/spontvol.pdf>

### **Crisis Counseling Assistance and Training Program**

<http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cmhs/emergencyservices/progguide.asp>

### **Disaster Nursing and Emergency Preparedness for Chemical, Biological, and Radiological Terrorism and Other Hazards**

Veenema, T.G., (editor). New York: Springer Publishing Company, Inc., 2003.

[http://www.springerpub.com/prod.aspx?prod\\_id=21438](http://www.springerpub.com/prod.aspx?prod_id=21438)

### **Disaster Technical Assistance Center**

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), Center for Mental Health Services

<http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/dtac>

### **Disaster Mental Health Training: Guidelines, Considerations, and Recommendations**

Young, B.H., Ruzek, J.I., Wong, M., Salzer, M.S., and Naturale, A.J. In *Interventions Following Mass Violence and Disasters: Strategies for Mental Health Practice*. Edited by Elspeth Cameron Ritchie, Patricia J. Watson, and Matthew J. Friedman. New York: Guilford Publications, 2006.

<http://www.istss.org/guilfordDMH.pdf>

### **Federal Family Assistance Plan for Aviation Disasters**

Prepared by the National Transportation Safety Board, August 1, 2000.

<http://www.nts.gov/publicatn/2000/SPC0001.pdf>

### **Mental Health All-Hazards Disaster Planning Guidance**

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. DHHS Pub. No. SMA 3829. Rockville, MD: Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2003.

<http://media.shs.net/ken/pdf/SMA03-3829/All-HazGuide.pdf>

### **Mental Health and Mass Violence: Evidence-Based Early Psychological Intervention for Victims/Survivors of Mass Violence**

National Institute of Mental Health. NIH Publication No. 02-5138, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2002.

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/massviolence.pdf>

### **National Incident Management System**

Published by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, March 1, 2004.

[http://www.fema.gov/pdf/nims/nims\\_doc\\_full.pdf](http://www.fema.gov/pdf/nims/nims_doc_full.pdf)

### **National Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism**

<http://www.mipt.org>

### **National Response Plan**

[http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/interapp/editorial/editorial\\_0566.xml](http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/interapp/editorial/editorial_0566.xml)

### **New York State County Disaster Mental Health Planning and Response Guide: A Guide for County Directors of Mental Health and Community Services**

Herrmann, J., University of Rochester, 2005.

<http://www.centerfordisastermedicine.org>

### **Pandemic Influenza**

<http://pandemicflu.gov/>

### **Preparing for the Psychological Consequences of Terrorism: A Public Health Strategy**

Butler, A.S., Panzer, A.M., & Goldfrank, L.R., (editors). Washington, DC: The National Academies Press, 2003.

<http://books.nap.edu/catalog/10717.html>

### **Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act**

United States Code, Title 42. The Public Health and Welfare, Chapter 68. Disaster Relief (As amended by Pub. L. 103-181, Pub. L. 103-337, and Pub. L. 106-390) Pub. L. 106-390, October 2000, 114 Stat. 1552-1575.

<http://www.fema.gov/library/stafact.shtm>

### **State Mental Health Authorities' Response to Terrorism**

National Association of State Mental Health Program Directors, (NASMHPD) Medical Directors Council, 66 Canal Center Plaza, Suite 302, Alexandria, VA 22314, February 2004.

[http://www.nasmhpd.org/general\\_files/publications/med\\_directors\\_pubs/Med%20Dir%20Terrorism%20Rpt%20-%20final.pdf](http://www.nasmhpd.org/general_files/publications/med_directors_pubs/Med%20Dir%20Terrorism%20Rpt%20-%20final.pdf)

### **Surge Hospitals: Providing Safe Care in Emergencies**

Published by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, 2006.

[http://www.jcaho.org/about+us/public+policy+initiatives/surge\\_hospital.pdf](http://www.jcaho.org/about+us/public+policy+initiatives/surge_hospital.pdf)

### **Terrorism and Disaster Management: Preparing Healthcare Leaders for the New Reality**

McGlown, K. J., (editor). Published by the Foundation of the American College of Healthcare. Chicago: Health Administration Press, 2004.

### **Trauma and Disaster: Response and Management**

Ursano, R., & Norwood, A.E. (editors). Review of Psychiatry Series, Volume 22, Number 1; Oldham, JM & Riba, M.B., (series editors). Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2003.

## **Risk Communication**

### **Communicating in a Crisis: Risk Communication Guidelines for Public Officials**

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (SAMHSA), Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 5600 Fishers Lane, Room 17C-26, Rockville, MD 20857, 2002.

<http://www.riskcommunication.samhsa.gov/index.htm>

### **Crisis & Emergency Risk Communication: By Leaders for Leaders, Course Book and Participants Manual**

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) in partnership with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Public Health Practice Program Office and the CDC Office of Communication (OC), Office of the Director (OD).

<http://www.cdc.gov/communication/emergency/leaders.pdf>

[http://www.cdc.gov/communication/emergency/part\\_man.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/communication/emergency/part_man.pdf)

### **Effective Media Communication During Public Health Emergencies, WHO Handbook, Field Guide, and Wall Chart**

Published by the World Health Organization, 2005.

<http://www.who.int/csr/resources/publication>

### **Terrorism and Other Public Health Emergencies: A Reference Guide for Media**

Office of the Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Washington, D.C. September 2005.

<http://www.hhs.gov/emergency/mediaguide/PDF/HHSMedisReferenceGuideFinal.pdf>

### **WHO Outbreak Combination Guidelines**

Published by the World Health Organization, 2005.

<http://www.who.int/infectious-disease-news/IDdocs/whocds200528/whocds200528en.pdf>

### **WHO Outbreak Communication, WHO Handbook for Journalists: Influenza Pandemic**

Published by the World Health Organization, 2005.

[http://www.who.int/csr/don/Handbook\\_influenza\\_pandemic\\_dec05.pdf](http://www.who.int/csr/don/Handbook_influenza_pandemic_dec05.pdf)

# **Appendix E: Handouts**

The following handouts were prepared by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) and the National Center for PostTraumatic Stress Disorder (NCPTSD) for the Medical Reserve Corps.

**ALCOHOL, MEDICATION, AND DRUG USE AFTER DISASTER**

**CONNECTING WITH OTHERS: SEEKING SOCIAL SUPPORT**

**CONNECTING WITH OTHERS: GIVING SOCIAL SUPPORT**

**TIPS FOR RELAXATION**

**WHEN TERRIBLE THINGS HAPPEN**

**TIPS FOR HELPING ADOLESCENTS AFTER DISASTERS (PART I & II)**

**TIPS FOR HELPING PRE-SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN AFTER DISASTERS  
(PART I & II)**

**TIPS FOR HELPING SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN AFTER DISASTERS  
(PART I & II)**

## **ALCOHOL, MEDICATION, AND DRUG USE AFTER DISASTER**

Some people increase their use of alcohol, prescription medications or other substances after a disaster. You may feel that using drugs and alcohol seem to help you escape bad feelings or physical symptoms related to stress responses (e.g., headaches, muscle tension). However, they can actually make these things worse in the long term because they interrupt natural sleep cycles, create health problems, interfere with relationships, and create potential dependence on the substance. If your use of alcohol or drugs has increased since the disaster or is causing problems for you, it is important for you to reduce your level of use or seek help in gaining control over your use.

### **Managing alcohol, medication, and drug use**

- Pay attention to any change in your use of alcohol and/or drugs.
- Correctly use prescription and over-the-counter medications as indicated.
- Eat well, exercise, get enough sleep, and use your family and others for support.
- If you feel like using larger amounts of either prescribed or over-the-counter medications, consult a healthcare professional.
- Consult with a healthcare professional about safe ways to reduce anxiety, depression, muscle tension, and sleep difficulties.
- If you find that you have greater difficulty controlling alcohol/substance use since the hurricane, seek support in doing so.
- If you believe you have a problem with substance abuse, talk to your doctor or counselor about it.

### **If you have had an alcohol, medication, or drug problem in the past**

For people who have successfully stopped drinking or using drugs, experiencing a disaster can sometimes result in strong urges to drink or use again. Sometimes it can lead them to strengthen their commitment to recovery. Whatever your experience, it is important to consciously choose to stay in recovery.

- Increase your attendance at substance abuse support groups.
- If you are receiving disaster crisis counseling, talk to your counselor about your past alcohol or drug use.
- If you have been forced to move out of your local community, talk to disaster workers about helping to locate nearby alcohol or drug recovery groups, or ask them to help organize a new support group.
- Talk with family and friends about supporting you to avoid use of alcohol or substances.
- If you have a 12-Step sponsor or substance abuse counselor, talk to him or her about your situation.
- Increase your use other supports that have helped you avoid relapse in the past.

## **CONNECTING WITH OTHERS**

### **SEEKING SOCIAL SUPPORT**

- Making contact with others can help reduce feelings of distress
- Children and adolescents can benefit from spending some time with other similar-age peers
- Connections can be with family, friends, or others who are coping with the same traumatic event

#### *Social Support Options*

- Spouse or partner
- Priest, Rabbi, or other clergy
- Support group
- Trusted family member
- Doctor or nurse
- Co-worker
- Close friend
- Crisis counselor or other counselor
- Pet

#### **Do . . .**

- Decide carefully whom to talk to
- Start by talking about practical things
- Ask others if it's a good time to talk
- Decide ahead of time what you want to discuss
- Let others know you need to talk or just to be with them
- Tell others you appreciate them listening
- Choose the right time and place
- Talk about painful thoughts and feelings when you're ready
- Tell others what you need or how they could help—one main thing that would help you right now

#### **Don't . . .**

- **Keep quiet because you don't want to upset others**
- **Assume that others don't want to listen**
- Keep quiet because you're worried about being a burden
- Wait until you're so stressed or exhausted that you can't fully benefit from help

#### *Ways to Get Connected*

- Calling friends or family on the phone
- Getting involved with a support group
- Increasing contact with existing acquaintances and friends
- Getting involved in community recovery activities
- Renewing or beginning involvement in church, synagogue, or other religious group activities

## **CONNECTING WITH OTHERS**

### **GIVING SOCIAL SUPPORT**

You can help family members and friends cope with the disaster by spending time with them and listening carefully. Most people recover better when they feel connected and understood to others who care about them. Some people choose not to talk about their experiences very much, and others may need to discuss their experiences on numerous occasions. Talking about things that happened because of the disaster can help them seem less overwhelming. At times, just spending time with people one feels close to and accepted by, without having to talk, can feel best. Here are some things we know about giving social support to other people after disasters.

#### **Reasons Why People May Avoid Social Support**

- Not knowing what they need
- Feeling embarrassed or “weak”
- Feeling they will lose control
- Not wanting to burden others
- Doubting it will be helpful, or that others won’t understand
- Having tried to get help and felt that it wasn’t there before
- Wanting to avoid thinking or feeling about the event
- Feeling that others will be disappointed or judgmental
- Not knowing where to get help

#### **Good Things to Do When Giving Support**

- Show interest, attention, and care
- Find an uninterrupted time and place to talk
- Be free of expectations or judgments
- Show respect for individuals’ reactions and ways of coping
- Acknowledge that this type of stress can take time to resolve
- Help brainstorm positive ways to deal with their reactions
- Talk about expectable reactions to disasters, and healthy coping
- Believe that the other is capable of recovery
- Offer to talk or spend time together as many times as is needed

#### **Things That Interfere with Giving Support**

- **Rushing to tell someone that he or she will be okay or that they should just “get over it”**
- Discussing your own personal experiences without listening to the other person’s story
- Stopping the person from talking about what is bothering them
- **Acting like someone is weak or exaggerating because he or she isn’t coping as well as you are**
- Giving advice without listening to the person’s concerns or asking the person what works for him or her
- Telling them they were lucky it wasn’t worse

#### **When Your Support is Not Enough...**

- Let the person know that experts think that avoidance and withdrawal are likely to increase distress, and social support helps recovery
- Encourage the other to get involved in a support group with others who have similar experiences
- Encourage the other to talk with a counselor, clergy, or medical professional, and offer to accompany them
- Enlist help from others in your social circle so that you all take part in supporting the other

## TIPS FOR RELAXATION

Tension and anxiety are common after disasters. Unfortunately, they can make it more difficult to cope with the many things that must be done to recover. There is no easy solution to coping with post-disaster problems, but taking time during the day to calm yourself through relaxation exercises may make it easier to sleep, concentrate, and have energy for coping with life. These can include muscular relaxation exercises, breathing exercises, meditation, swimming, stretching, yoga, prayer, exercise, listening to quiet music, spending time in nature, and so on. Here are some basic breathing exercises that may help:

### FOR YOURSELF:

1. Inhale slowly (one-thousand one; one-thousand two; one-thousand three) through your nose and comfortably fill your lungs all the way down to your belly.
2. Silently and gently say to yourself, "My body is filled with calmness." Exhale slowly (one-thousand one, one-thousand two, one-thousand three) through your mouth and comfortably empty your lungs all the way down to your abdomen.
3. Silently and gently say to yourself, "My body is releasing the tension."
4. Repeat five times slowly and comfortably.
5. Do this as many times a day as needed.

### FOR CHILDREN:

Lead a child through a breathing exercise:

1. "Let's practice a different way of breathing that can help calm our bodies down.
2. Put one hand on your stomach, like this [demonstrate].
3. Okay, we are going to breathe in through our noses. When we breathe in, we are going to fill up with a lot of air and our stomachs are going to stick out like this [demonstrate].
4. Then, we will breathe out through our mouths. When we breathe out, our stomachs are going to suck in and up like this [demonstrate].
5. We are going to breathe in really slowly while I count to three. I'm also going to count to three while we breathe out really slowly.
6. Let's try it together. Great job!"

Make a game of it:

- Blow bubbles with a bubble wand and dish soap
- Blow bubbles with chewing gum
- Blow paper wads or cotton balls across the table
- Tell a story where the child helps you imitate a character who is taking deep breaths (i.e., the three little pigs)

# When Terrible Things Happen

## What You May Experience

### *Intrusive reactions*

- Distressing thoughts or images of the event while awake or dreaming
- Upsetting emotional or physical reactions to reminders of the experience
- Feeling like the experience is happening all over again (“flashback”)

### *Avoidance and withdrawal reactions*

- Avoid talking, thinking, and having feelings about the traumatic event
- Avoid reminders of the event (places and people connected to what happened)
- Restricted emotions; feeling numb
- Feelings of detachment and estrangement from others; social withdrawal
- Loss of interest in usually pleasurable activities

### *Physical arousal reactions*

- Constantly being "on the lookout" for danger, startling easily, or being jumpy
- Irritability or outbursts of anger
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep, problems concentrating or paying attention

### *Trauma and Loss reminders*

- Places, people, sights, sounds, smells, and feelings that remind you of trauma or loss
- Can bring on distressing mental images, thoughts, and emotional/physical reactions
- Common examples include: sudden loud noises, destroyed buildings, the smell of fire, sirens of ambulances, locations where they experienced the trauma, seeing people with disabilities, funerals, anniversaries of the trauma, and television/radio news about the trauma

### *What Helps*

#### **Talking to another person for support**

- Engage in positive distracting activities (sports, hobbies, reading)
- Getting adequate rest and eating healthy meals
- Trying to maintain a normal schedule
- Scheduling pleasant activities

#### **Spending time with others**

- Using relaxation methods (breathing exercises, meditation, calming self-talk)
- Participating in a support group
- Exercising in moderation
- Keeping a journal

#### **Taking breaks**

#### **Seeking counseling**

### *What Doesn't Help*

- |  |                      |  |
|--|----------------------|--|
| • Using alcohol or drugs to cope       | • “Workaholism”      | • Extreme avoidance of thinking or talking about the event |
| • Withdrawing from family or friends   | • Anger or violence  | • Not taking care of yourself                              |
| • Overeating or failing to eat         | • Doing risky things | • Excessive TV or computer games                           |
| • Withdrawing from pleasant activities | • Blaming others     |  |



### Tips for Helping Adolescents After Disasters (Part I)

Reactions	Responses	Examples of things to do and say
<p><u>Detachment, shame, and guilt</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Provide a safe time to discuss with your teen the events and their feelings.</li> <li>▶ Emphasize that these feelings are common, and correct excessive self-blame with realistic explanations of what actually could have been done.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ “Many kids—and adults—feel like you do, angry and blaming themselves that they couldn’t do more. You’re not at fault—remember, even the firefighters said there was nothing more we could have done.”</li> </ul>
<p><u>Self-consciousness</u> about their fears, sense of vulnerability, fear of being labeled abnormal</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Help teens understand that these feelings are common.</li> <li>▶ Encourage relationships with family and peers for needed support during the recovery period.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ “I was feeling the same thing. Scared and helpless. Most people feel like this when a disaster happens, even if they look calm on the outside.”</li> <li>▶ “My cell phone is working again, why don’t you see if you can get a hold of Pete to see how he’s doing.”</li> <li>▶ “And thanks for playing the game with your little sister. She’s much better now.”</li> </ul>
<p><u>Acting out behavior</u>; using alcohol and drugs, sexual acting out, accident-prone behavior.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Help teens understand that acting out behavior is a dangerous way to express strong feelings (like anger) over what happened.</li> <li>▶ Limit access to alcohol and drugs.</li> <li>▶ Talk about the danger of high-risk sexual activity.</li> <li>▶ On a time-limited basis, have them let you know where they are going and what they’re planning to do.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ “Many teens—and some adults—feel out of control and angry after a disaster like this. They think drinking or taking drugs will help somehow. It’s very normal to feel that way—but it’s not a good idea to act on it.”</li> <li>▶ “It’s important during these times that I know where you are and how to contact you.” Assure them that this extra checking-in is temporary, just until things have stabilized.</li> </ul>
<p><u>Fears of recurrence and reactions to reminders</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Help to identify different reminders (people, places, sounds, smells, feelings, time of day) and to clarify the difference between the event and the reminders that occur after it.</li> <li>▶ Explain to teens that media coverage of the disaster can trigger fears of it happening again.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ “When you’re reminded, you might try saying to yourself, ‘I am upset now because I am being reminded, but it is different now because there is no hurricane and I am safe.’”</li> <li>▶ Suggest “Watching the news reports could make it worse, because they are playing the same images over and over. How about turning it off now?”</li> </ul>

## Tips for Helping Adolescents After Disasters (Part II)

Reactions	Responses	Examples of things to do and say
<u>Abrupt shifts in interpersonal relationships</u> : Teens may pull away from parents, family, and even from peers; they may respond strongly to parent’s reactions in the crisis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Explain that the strain on relationships is expectable. Emphasize that we need family and friends for support during the recovery period.</li> <li>▶ Encourage tolerance for different family member’s courses to recovery.</li> <li>▶ Accept responsibility for your own feelings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Spend more time talking as a family about how everyone is doing. Say, “You know, the fact that we’re crabby with each other is completely normal, given what we’ve been through. I think we’re handling things amazingly. It’s a good thing we have each other.”</li> <li>▶ You might say, “I appreciate your being calm when your brother was screaming last night. I know he woke you up too.”</li> <li>▶ “I want to apologize for being irritable with you yesterday. I am going to work harder to stay calm myself.”</li> </ul>
<u>Radical changes in attitude</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Explain that changes in people’s attitudes after a disaster are common, but will return back to normal over time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ “We are all under great stress. When people’s lives are disrupted this way, we all feel more scared, angry—even full of revenge. It might not seem like it, but we all will feel better when we get back to a more structured routine.”</li> </ul>
<u>Wanting premature entrance into adulthood</u> : (e.g., wanting to leave school, get married)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Encourage postponing major life decisions. Find other ways to make the adolescent feel more in control over things.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ “I know you’re thinking about quitting school and getting a job to help out. But it’s important not to make big decisions right now. A crisis time is not a great time to make major changes.”</li> </ul>
<u>Concern for other victims and families</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Encourage constructive activities on behalf of others, but do not burden with undo responsibility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Help teens to identify projects that are age-appropriate and meaningful (e.g., clearing rubble from school grounds, collecting money or supplies for those in need).</li> </ul>

## Tips for Helping Preschool-Age Children After Disasters (Part I)

Reactions/Behavior	Responses	Examples of things to do and say
<p><u>Helplessness and Passivity</u>: Young children know they can't protect themselves. In a disaster they feel even more helpless. They want to know their parents will keep them safe. They might express this by being unusually quiet or agitated.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Provide comfort, rest, food, water, and opportunities for play and drawing.</li> <li>▶ Provide ways to turn spontaneous drawing or playing from traumatic events to include something that would make them feel safer or better.</li> <li>▶ Reassure your child that you and other grownups will protect them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Give your child more hugs, hand holding, or time in your lap.</li> <li>▶ Make sure there is a special safe area for your child to play with proper supervision.</li> <li>▶ In play, a four year old keeps having the blocks knocked down by hurricane winds. Asked, "Can you make it safe from the winds?" the child quickly builds a double block thick wall and says, "Winds won't get us now." A parent might respond with, "That wall sure is strong" and explain, "We're doing a lot of things to keep us safe."</li> </ul>
<p><u>General Fearfulness</u>: Young children may become more afraid of being alone, being in the bathroom, going to sleep, or otherwise separated from parents. Children want to believe that their parents can protect them in all situations and that other grownups, such as teachers or police officers, are there to help them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Be as calm as you can with your child. Try not to voice your own fears in front of your child.</li> <li>▶ Help children regain confidence that you aren't leaving them and that you can protect them.</li> <li>▶ Remind them that there are people working to keep families safe, and that your family can get more help if you need to.</li> <li>▶ If you leave, reassure your children you will be back. Tell them a realistic time in words they understand, and be back on time.</li> <li>▶ Give your child ways to communicate their fears to you.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Be aware when you are on the phone or talking to others, that your child does not overhear you expressing fear.</li> <li>▶ Say things such as, "We are safe from the hurricane now, and people are working hard to make sure we are okay."</li> <li>▶ Say, "If you start feeling more scared, come and take my hand. Then I'll know you need to tell me something."</li> </ul>
<p><u>Confusion about the danger being over</u>: Young children can overhear things from adults and older children, or see things on TV or just imagine that it is happening all over again. They believe the danger is closer to home, even if it happened further away.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Give simple, repeated explanations as needed, even every day. Make sure they understand the words you are using.</li> <li>▶ Find out what other words or explanations they have heard and clarify inaccuracies.</li> <li>▶ If you are at some distance from the danger, it is important to tell your child that the danger is not near you.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Continue to explain to your child that the hurricane has passed and that you are away from the flooded area</li> <li>▶ Draw, or show on a map, how far away you are from the disaster area, and that where you are is safe. "See? The hurricane was way over there, and we're way over here in this safe place."</li> </ul>

## Tips for Helping Preschool-Age Children After Disasters (Part II)

Reactions/Behavior	Responses	Examples of things to do and say
<u>Not talking</u> : Being silent or having difficulty saying what is bothering them.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Put common feelings of children into words, such as anger, sadness, and worry about the safety of parents, friends and siblings.</li> <li>▶ Do not force them to talk, but let them know they can talk to you any time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Draw simple “happy faces” for different feelings on paper plates. Tell a brief story about each one, such as, “Remember when the water came into the house and had a worried face like this?”</li> <li>▶ Say something like, “Children can feel really sad when their home is damaged.”</li> <li>▶ Provide art or play materials to help them express themselves. Then use feeling words to check out how they felt. “This is a really scary picture. Were you scared when you saw the water?”</li> </ul>
<u>Fears the disaster will return</u> : When having reminders--seeing, hearing, or otherwise sensing something that reminds them of the disaster.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Explain the difference between the event and reminders of the event.</li> <li>▶ Protect children from things that will remind them as best you can.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ “Even though it’s raining, that doesn’t mean the hurricane is happening again. A rainstorm is smaller and can’t wreck stuff like a hurricane can.”</li> <li>▶ Keep your child from seeing television, radio, and computer images of the disaster that can trigger fears of it happening again.”</li> </ul>
<u>Sleep problems</u> : fear of being alone at night, sleeping alone, waking up afraid, having bad dreams.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Reassure your child that s/he is safe. Spend extra quiet time together at bedtime.</li> <li>▶ Let the child sleep with a dim light on, or sleep with you for a limited time.</li> <li>▶ Some might understand an explanation of the difference between dreams and real life.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Provide calming activities before bedtime. Tell a favorite story with a comforting theme.</li> <li>▶ At bedtime say, “You can sleep with us tonight, but tomorrow you’ll sleep in your own bed.”</li> <li>▶ “Bad dreams come from our thoughts inside about being scared, not from real things happening.”</li> </ul>
<u>Returning to earlier behaviors</u> : Thumb sucking, bedwetting, baby-talk, needing to be in your lap	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Remain neutral or matter-of-fact, as best you can, as these may continue a while after the disaster.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ If your child starts bedwetting, change her clothes and linens without comment. Don’t let anyone criticize or shame the child by saying, “You’re such a baby.”</li> </ul>
<u>Not understanding about death</u> : Preschool age children don’t understand that death is not reversible. They have “magical thinking” and might believe their thoughts caused the death. The loss of a pet may be very hard on a child.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Give age-appropriate consistent explanation--that does not give false hopes--about the reality of death.</li> <li>▶ Don’t minimize their feelings over a loss of a pet or a special toy.</li> <li>▶ Take cues from what your child seems to want to know. Answer simply and ask if he has any more questions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Allow children to participate in cultural and religious grieving rituals.</li> <li>▶ Help them find their own way to say goodbye by drawing a happy memory or lighting a candle or saying a prayer for them.</li> <li>▶ “No, Pepper won’t be back, but we can think about him and talk about him and remember what a silly doggy he was.”</li> <li>▶ “The firefighter said no one could save Pepper and it wasn’t your fault. I know you miss him very much.”</li> </ul>

## Tips for Helping School-Age Children After Disasters (Part I)

Reactions	Responses	Examples of things to do and say
<u>Confusion about what happened</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Give clear explanations of what happened whenever your child asks. Avoid details that would scare your child. Correct any information that your child is unclear or confused about regarding if there is a present danger.</li> <li>▶ Remind children that there are people working to keep families safe and that your family can get more help if needed.</li> <li>▶ Let your children know what they can expect to happen next.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ “I know other kids said that more hurricanes are coming, but we are now in a place that is safer from hurricanes.”</li> <li>▶ Continue to answer questions your children have (without getting irritable) and to reassure them the family is safe.</li> <li>▶ Tell them what’s happening, especially about issues regarding school and where they will be living.</li> </ul>
<u>Feelings of being responsible:</u> School-age children may have concerns that they were somehow at fault, or should have been able to change what happened. They may hesitate to voice their concerns in front of others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Provide opportunities for children to voice their concerns to you.</li> <li>▶ Offer reassurance and tell them why it was not their fault.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Take your child aside. Explain that, “After a disaster like this, lots of kids—and parents too—keep thinking ‘What could I have done differently?’ or ‘I should have been able to do something.’ That doesn’t mean they were at fault.”</li> <li>▶ “Remember? The firefighter said no one could save Pepper and it wasn’t your fault.”</li> </ul>
<u>Fears of recurrence of the event and reactions to reminders</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Help child to identify reminders (people, places, sounds, smells, feelings, time of day) and to clarify the difference between the event and the reminders that occur after it.</li> <li>▶ Reassure them, as often as they need, that they are safe.</li> <li>▶ Protect children from seeing media coverage of the event as it can trigger fears of the disaster happening again.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ When they recognize that they are being reminded, say, “Try to think to yourself, ‘I am upset because I am being reminded of the hurricane because it is raining, but now there is no hurricane and I am safe.’”</li> <li>▶ “I think we need to take a break from the TV right now.”</li> </ul>
<u>Retelling the event</u> or playing out the event over and over	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Permit the child to talk and act out these reactions. Let them know that this is normal.</li> <li>▶ Encourage positive problem-solving in play or drawing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ “I notice you’re drawing a lot of pictures of what happened. Did you know that many children do that?”</li> <li>▶ “It might help to draw about how you would like your school to be rebuilt to make it safer.”</li> </ul>

## Tips for Helping School-Age Children After Disasters (Part II)

Reactions/Behavior	Responses	Examples of things to do and say
<u>Fear of being overwhelmed by their feelings</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Provide a safe place for them to express their fears, anger, sadness, etc. Allow children to cry or be sad; don't expect them to be brave or tough.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ "When scary things happen, people have strong feelings, like being mad at everyone or being very sad. Would you like to sit here with a blanket until you're feeling better?"</li> </ul>
<u>Sleep problems</u> , including bad dreams, fear of sleeping alone, demanding to sleep with parents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Let your child tell you about the bad dream. Explain that bad dreams are normal and they will go away. Do not ask the child to go into too many details of the bad dream.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ "That was a scary dream. Let's think about some good things you can dream about and I'll rub your back until you fall asleep."</li> </ul>
<u>Concerns</u> about the safety of themselves and others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Help them to share their worries and give them realistic information.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Create a "worry box" where children can write out their worries and place them in the box. Set a time to look these over, problem-solve, and come up with answers to the worries.</li> </ul>
<u>Altered behavior</u> : Unusually aggressive or restless behavior.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Encourage the child to engage in recreational activities and exercise as an outlet for feelings and frustration.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ "I know you didn't mean to slam that door. It must be hard to feel so angry."</li> <li>▶ "How about if we take a walk? Sometimes getting our bodies moving helps with strong feelings."</li> </ul>
<u>Somatic complaints</u> : Headaches, stomachaches, muscle aches for which there seem to be no reason.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Find out if there is a medical reason. If not, provide comfort and assurance that this is normal.</li> <li>▶ Be matter-of-fact with your child; giving these non-medical complaints too much attention may increase them.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Make sure the child gets enough sleep, eats well, drinks plenty of water, and gets enough exercise.</li> <li>▶ "How about sitting over there? When you feel better, let me know and we can play cards."</li> </ul>
<u>Closely watching a parent's responses and recovery</u> : not wanting to disturb parent with their own worries.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Give children opportunities to talk about their feelings as well as your own.</li> <li>▶ Remain as calm as you can, so as not to increase your child's worries.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ "Yes, my ankle is broken, but it feels better since the paramedics wrapped it. I bet it was scary seeing me hurt, wasn't it?"</li> </ul>
<u>Concern</u> for other victims and families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Encourage constructive activities on behalf of others, but do not burden with undo responsibility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Help children identify projects that are age-appropriate and meaningful (e.g., clearing rubble from school grounds, collecting money or supplies for those in need).</li> </ul>

## Appendix F: Working with Older Adults

**Older adults have areas of strength as well as vulnerability. Many elderly individuals can be highly resilient, having acquired effective coping skills through a lifetime of experience in dealing with adversity. Alternatively, some may be more vulnerable to stress due to a variety of age-related impairments.**

Factors contributing to strength in the elderly include:

- Having effective coping skills (mature perspective, patience, faith, interpersonal skills)
- Having a supportive network of family, friends, neighbors, community groups, and organizations

Factors that may increase vulnerability to stress in the elderly include:

- Health problems such as: physical illness; problems with blood pressure, fluid and electrolyte balance; frailty (increased susceptibility to falls, minor injuries and bruising)
- Age-related sensory loss:
  - Visual loss, which can limit awareness of surroundings and add to confusion
  - Hearing loss, resulting in gaps in understanding of what others are saying
- Cognitive problems, such a difficulty with attention, concentration and memory
- Dependency on prescription or other medications
- Being on a fixed or low income
- Social isolation, separation from close family members and friends
- Lacking mobility and/or transportation

In working with older adults, the PFA provider should keep the following in mind:

- Talk at eye level, allowing him/her to see your lips when you speak
- Speak clearly and in a low pitch

- Don't make assumptions based only on physical appearance or age, such as that a confused elder is senile. Reasons for apparent confusion may include: disaster-related disorientation due to change in surroundings; poor vision or hearing; poor nutrition or dehydration; sleep deprivation; a medical condition or problems with medications; social isolation; and feeling helpless or vulnerable
- Speak to the elderly person, unless direct communication is difficult
- In general, take the word of a person who claims to have a disability, even if the disability is not obvious or familiar to you
- When you are unsure of how to help, ask, "What can I do to help?" and trust what the person tells you
- Where possible, enable the person to be self sufficient
- An elderly person with a psychiatric or emotional disability may be more upset or confused in unfamiliar surroundings. If you identify such an individual, help to make arrangements for a mental health consultation or referral.

To provide effective assistance, you can:

- *Safety*: Help to make the physical environment safer, (for example, try to insure adequate lighting, and protect against slipping, tripping and falling.
- *Sensory*: Ask specifically about his/her needs for eyeglasses, hearing aids, or other medical devices.
- *Assistance with Physical Tasks*: Ask whether the elder needs help with health-related issues or daily activities (e.g., assistance with dressing, use of bathroom, daily grooming, meals; supportive clothing; walker, cane).
- *Medications and Medical Equipment*: Inquire about medications—ask if he/she has a list of current medications or where this information can be obtained. Make sure he/she has a readable copy of this information to keep during the post-disaster period. Ask about whether he/she needs medical equipment or supplies (for example, medications, oxygen and wheelchairs). Try to insure that all essential aids are kept with the person.
- *Advocacy/Monitoring*: If available, contact relatives to insure safety, nutrition, medications and rest.
- Make sure that the authorities are aware of any daily needs that are not being met.
- *Housing/Discharge*: Help with plans for an elder who is going home or needs access to alternative housing. Make sure the elder has referral sources for the following, if needed: