

# Psychological First Aid Information Module at Christopher Newport University

## Grace Overman

### What is it?

Psychological First Aid is a way for us, as a community, to be more prepared to handle crisis situations. This information module will provide you with the knowledge necessary to make a connection with someone in a crisis situation, assess their immediate needs, deescalate the emotions of the situation, and guide the survivor to further resources.

### 1. Contact and Engagement

- **Goal:**
- Establish a connection with the survivor in a compassionate way by either responding to a survivor's contact, or initiating contact with a survivor
- Do not force contact!
- Psychological First Aid is never invasive!
- **Methods:**
- Don't interrupt conversations
- Don't assume that your offer for help will be received. If they decline your offer for help, respect their decision.
- Introduce yourself and ask for permission to talk to them and create a private environment.
- Create a private environment and ask if they have any immediate needs
- Maintain the highest level of confidentiality possible. Only divulge information in the event of a safety concern and to the proper personnel.
- Take cues from the survivor in terms of personal space.
- Be sure to face the survivor, regarding them with warmth through verbal and nonverbal cues.
- To slow things down, utilize the STOP approach: Sit Think Observe Plan.
- Projecting warmth: soft tone, smile, appropriate distance, open/welcoming gestures
- Increasing trust and confidence: face the speaker, maintain an open posture, soft eye contact, and a calm demeanor.

### 2. Safety and Comfort

- **Goal:**
- Enhance immediate and ongoing safety, and provide physical and emotional comfort in order to restore a sense of safety.
- **Methods:**
- Make sure that individuals and families are physically safe to the extent possible in the situation at hand.
- Contact emergency personnel who can resolve safety concerns that are beyond your ability to control.
- Remove hazardous objects.
- Place barriers to prevent intrusions by unauthorized persons.
- Look for signs that persons may hurt themselves or others such as expressing intense anger towards self or others or exhibiting extreme agitation.
- 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

### 3. Stabilization

- **Goal:** To calm and orient emotionally overwhelmed or disoriented survivors
- **Methods:**
- How to recognize someone in crisis
  - Glassy eyed and vacant
  - Unresponsive to verbal cues/questions
  - Disorientation
  - Strong emotional responses
  - Uncontrollable physical reaction (ie: shaking)
  - Exhibiting frantic behavior
  - Incapacitated with worry or fear
  - Engaging in high-risk behavior.
- How to help
  - Address his or her immediate concerns rather than attempting to convince the survivor to calm down
  - Lead them through calming routines
    - Taking a short walk
    - Breathing deeply
    - Having a conversation
    - Name 5 non-distressing things they can see/hear/feel in the environment.

### 4. Information Gathering

- **Goals:**
- To address immediate needs and concerns, gather additional information, and tailor your intervention to the survivor.
- **Methods:**
- Ask about:
  - Need for immediate referral
  - Need for additional services
  - Offer a follow-up meeting
  - The experience of the survivor
  - The concerns, feelings, and fears of the survivor

### 5. Practical Assistance

- **Goals:**
- To offer practical help to survivors in addressing immediate needs and concerns.
- **Methods:**
- Identify the most immediate needs
- Clarify the need
- Discuss an action plan
- Act to address the need

### 6. Connection with Social Supports

- **Goals:**
- Assist survivors to get in touch with social support.
- Encourage survivors to communicate effectively with their social support network.
- **Methods:**
- Connect them with immediately available support persons
  - Relief workers
  - Other survivors
- Encourage them to reach out to loved ones for help
- Remind survivors that it is okay if they don't feel like talking about what they went through
- Spending time with others doesn't require them to talk about their experiences
- The important thing is that they don't become isolated.

### 7. Information on Coping

- **Goal:**
- Provide individuals with information on potential coping skills in order to decrease stress and maximize adaptive functioning skills.
- **Methods:**
- Explain that there are multiple types of therapy and different types work best for different people and have contact information to provide them with the ability to seek further treatment.

### 8. Linkage with Collaborative Services

- **Goal:**
- Determine local facilities to refer people to after an incident occurs, if further assistance is necessary.
- **Methods:**
- Provide survivors with assistance connecting to further treatment options such as therapy or medical treatment.

### Learn More!

- Go to the Psychological First Aid website
  - <https://tinyurl.com/PFA-information-module>
- Click on the button labelled "Learn more about Psychological First Aid!"

### References

National Center for PTSD, & National Child Traumatic Stress Network. (2006). *Psychological First Aid: Field Operations Guide* (2nd ed.). National Center for PTSD and National Child Traumatic Stress Network. New Jersey Department of Human Services Division of Mental Health and Addiction Services Disaster & Terrorism Branch. (n.d). *Psychological First Aid* [PDF]. Retrieved from [https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/dmhas/home/disaster/credentialing/DRCC\\_Training\\_Materials/Psych\\_1st\\_Aid.pdf](https://www.state.nj.us/humanservices/dmhas/home/disaster/credentialing/DRCC_Training_Materials/Psych_1st_Aid.pdf)