

## Comparison of Psychological First Aid and Crisis Debriefing

Psychological First Aid (PFA) and Crisis Debriefing are both types of crisis response interventions.<sup>1</sup> While Psychological First Aid can be done by any member of the community, crisis debriefing is typically done by those who have received more specialized training and by those who have an ongoing connection with a trained mental health professional.

### Deciding between Psychological First Aid and Crisis Debriefing

Both PFA and Crisis Debriefing have similar goals – to stabilize, educate, and enhance coping.

**Psychological First Aid** is what is needed during or immediately following a crisis situation. This is provided when a situation is “hot,” meaning when it has just occurred and there are still many logistical and practical needs. Generally there is more chaos during this time and the victims are still in shock and therefore not yet able to verbally process the emotional impact of the crisis. It is also possible that some elements of PFA will be needed later when the situation is “warm” or “cool.”

**Crisis debriefing** is a specialized intervention that can be helpful in the days and weeks following the crisis. Immediate and emergency needs have been attended to and the person has more mental and emotional space to process not only their immediate needs but also their intermediate and long term needs.

In the following chart we distinguish the typical timing for PFA and Crisis Debriefing by referring to Hot vs. Warm or Cool situations.

## Comparison of PFA and Crisis Debriefing

HOT – PFA	WARM/COOL- CRISIS DEBRIEFING
<p><b>Step 1 – Pre-Intervention:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-Assessment: Am I prepared?</li> <li>• Gather Information about the crisis</li> <li>• Gather information about the victims</li> <li>• Set up logistics</li> </ul>	<p><b>Step 1 – Pre-Intervention:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-Assessment: Am I prepared?</li> <li>• Gather Information about the crisis</li> <li>• Gather information about the victims</li> <li>• Set up logistics</li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 2 – Establish Contact</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observe</li> <li>• Prioritize safety needs</li> <li>• Introduce yourself</li> <li>• Make the person comfortable</li> <li>• Get their permission to help</li> <li>• Respect their wishes – offer, respect, abide</li> <li>• Share any relevant information with them about what is happening and help that is available.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Step 2 – Establish Contact</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Observe</li> <li>• Prioritize safety needs</li> <li>• Introduce yourself</li> <li>• Make the person comfortable</li> <li>• Get their permission to help</li> <li>• Respect their wishes – offer, respect, abide</li> <li>• Explain purpose of debriefing and what they can expect</li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 3 – Stabilization (if needed)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grounding</li> <li>• Deep breathing</li> <li>• Other ways to calm agitated survivors</li> </ul>	<p><b>Step 3 – Listen to the story/stabilization (if needed)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open ended questions – listen for facts, thoughts, feelings, sensory experiences</li> <li>• Use stabilization techniques of grounding and deep breathing if needed</li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 4 – Listen and Discern Priority Needs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Find out what their immediate needs are</li> <li>• Find out what resources they already have</li> <li>• Try to reduce intensity and agitation with calm presence and supportive practical focus more than emotional focus.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Step 4 – Listen and Discern Impact:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Invite them to talk about the impact of the crisis – emotional, relational, spiritual, and physical.</li> <li>• Avoid probing or being intrusive in any way.</li> <li>• Use skills of normalizing, acknowledge and reframe, and education.</li> </ul>

<b>HOT – PFA</b>	<b>WARM/COOL- CRISIS DEBRIEFING</b>
<p><b>Step 5 – Response to Priority Needs:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practical Helps (more important than emotional processing at this stage)</li> <li>• Connect them to their social supports</li> <li>• Connect them to specialty services (medical, counseling, pastor, social services)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Step 5 – Educate:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Common reactions</li> <li>• Triggers/Reminders</li> <li>• Tips for parents/caregivers</li> <li>• Grief reactions</li> <li>• Other relevant information</li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 6: Give Information:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Don't overwhelm them with too much information</li> <li>• Some basic information on coping</li> <li>• Relevant resource information</li> <li>• Identify support system</li> </ul>	<p><b>Step 6: Help them Develop Coping Plan:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Review their coping strategy – short term and long term</li> <li>• Suggest additional coping resources (e.g., sleep aids; asking for help)</li> <li>• Relevant resource information</li> <li>• Identify support system that will help to implement coping plan</li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 7: Follow Up:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine which of the recommendations will need further action from you</li> <li>• Make a plan to follow up</li> <li>• Schedule a crisis debriefing if it seems appropriate</li> </ul>	<p><b>Step 7: Follow Up:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make a plan to contact them in the future to see how they are coping and any additional resources they may need</li> </ul>

Additional Resources/Supporting Documents:

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<sup>i</sup> Key Terms and Concepts for Crisis Response Training (1.4)