

# Steps of Psychological First Aid

## 1. Establish contact and build rapport

- Introduce yourself and your role
- Ask for their name
- Ask permission to talk with them and explain you are there to see if you can help
- Be respectful and compassionate
- Speak softly and calmly

## 2. Enhance safety and provide comfort

- Make sure current environment is as safe and comfortable as possible
- Identify and reduce any current threats of harm
- Ask if they need help with any health-related issues
- Seek medical support when needed
- Check on things like thirst, hunger, and other physical needs
- Provide them with relevant information about the current event and what is being done to assist them but do not overwhelm them with information.

## 3. Stabilize those who are emotionally overwhelmed

- Notice anyone who seems to be in shock, is disoriented, or is showing strong emotional responses
- Remain calm, quiet, and present with them
- Try to find family or friends who may be able to help to bring calm
- Invite the person to go with you to a quiet place
- If person is very upset, you want to avoid comments like “Just calm down”. Try saying something like, “I can see that you’re very upset right now and you have good reason to be upset. Let’s you and I go sit over here and talk about it together. I’m going to stay here with you and help you. We’ll walk through this together.”
- Use deep breathing techniques to help them experience calm<sup>i</sup>
- Use grounding techniques to help them get re-oriented<sup>ii</sup>
- Find out what their immediate needs are and respond to those.
- Offer support that helps them to focus on specific manageable feelings or thoughts

## 4. Gather information about current needs and concerns

- 1) Invite them to talk - “Would you like to talk about it?”
- 2) Say things that help them elaborate such as “And then what happened? or “What happened next?”
- 3) Draw out their reactions with comments such as, “That must have been difficult”, “How did you feel about that?” “That sounds painful.”

- 4) Find out the nature of what they experienced and the severity of the crisis for them<sup>iii</sup>
- 5) Find out what their immediate concerns are (e.g., separated from a loved one, need for housing, need for child care, need to contact certain people).
- 6) Do an assessment of their current functioning.<sup>iv</sup>
- 7) Assess risk of them harming themselves or others in their current state
- 8) Find out about any impending decisions or responsibilities – tonight, weekend, next several days/weeks

## 5. Offer practical assistance

- Identify their most immediate needs
- Clarify what will be helpful in responding to those needs
- Discuss an action plan for each of the needs
- Help them to develop steps for implementing those action plans
- Offer practical helps or connect them with people who can help

## 6. Connect with social supports

- Find out who their primary support system is (family, friends, teammates, church members)
- Take practical steps to get them connected to their primary supports who can provide practical and emotional support
- If they are reluctant to seek support, find out why this is (e.g., afraid of being a burden, feeling embarrassed or weak about needing help, feeling that no one can understand what they have been through).
- Reassure them that we all need the help of others and for many people it is a gift to be able to help others

## 7. Give information on coping

- Review common reactions to trauma<sup>v</sup>
- Ask how they have coped with difficult things in the past
- Provide basic information on ways to cope<sup>vi</sup>

## 8. Link to needed services

- Summarize what you have heard them say about their concerns and needs
- Suggest specialized services to address needs (e.g., medical, psychological, pastoral)<sup>vii</sup>
- Help them get connected to those services
- Offer to make follow-up contact with them to see how things are going
- Make a record of your intervention and your recommendations<sup>viii</sup>

## 9. Caregiver Support

- Recognize that as a caregiver, you have also been impacted by this event<sup>ix</sup>
- Seek support for yourself
- Make a plan for rest, recovery, and debriefing your own experience
- Implement coping strategies for yourself<sup>x</sup>

### Additional Resources/Supporting Documents:

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- <sup>i</sup> Deep Breathing (8.10)
- <sup>ii</sup> Grounding Techniques (8.9)
- <sup>iii</sup> Crisis Factors that Increase Severity of Impact (6.3)
- <sup>iv</sup> Crisis Assessment using BASICS Model (6.4)
- <sup>v</sup> Common Reactions to Trauma (6.6, 6.7, 6.8)
- <sup>vi</sup> Ways to Cope After a Trauma (7.7)
- <sup>vii</sup> Guidelines for Referral (8.14)
- <sup>viii</sup> Crisis Response Documentation (9.4)
- <sup>ix</sup> Secondary traumatic stress (11.2)
- <sup>x</sup> Peer Responder Self-care Strategies (11.4)