Psychological First Aid
Learning Objectives

At the end of this course, participants will be able to:

- Identify the basic objectives and intervention strategies of Psychological First Aid.
- Gain skills needed to implement the intervention strategies of Psychological First Aid.
- Adapt Psychological First Aid in diverse settings and with different populations.
- Appreciate the importance of providing Psychological First Aid in the aftermath of disaster.
- Gain confidence in implementing Psychological First Aid in the immediate aftermath of a disaster.
- Identify ways to enhance provider care before, during, and after disaster care.
What is Psychological First Aid?

- PFA is:

  An evidence-informed modular approach to assist children, adolescents, adults, and families in the immediate aftermath of disaster and terrorism.
What are PFA’s Principle Actions?

• PFA’s principle actions are to:
  – Establish safety and security
  – Connect to restorative resources
  – Reduce stress-related reactions
  – Foster adaptive short- and long-term coping
  – Enhance natural resilience (rather than preventing long-term pathology)
Who Delivers PFA?

- PFA is delivered by disaster response workers who provide early assistance, including:
  - First responders
  - Mental health professionals
  - School personnel
  - Religious professionals
  - Disaster volunteers
  - Health and public health officials
## Psychological First Aid Core Actions

*(Dr. Blanck video click above)*

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Provider Care: Management

• Mandated rotation where workers are moved from the most highly exposed assignments to varied levels of exposure

• Enforced support by providing/encouraging:
  – Regular supervision
  – Regular case conferences
  – Peer partners and peer consultation
Provider Care: Management (cont.)

- Monitor providers who meet certain high risk criteria
- Conduct trainings on stress management practices
Provider Care: Personal

• Limit daily numbers of most severe cases
• Utilize the buddy system to share distressing emotional responses
• Use benefit time, vacation, personal time
• Access supervision routinely
• Practice stress management during the workday
• Stay aware of limitations and needs
Provider Care: Personal (cont.)

• Providers should make every effort to avoid:
  – Working too long by themselves without checking in
  – Working “around the clock” with few breaks
  – Feeling like they are not doing enough
  – Excessive intake of sweets and caffeine
Common attitudinal obstacles to self-care:
- “It would be selfish to take time to rest.”
- “Others are working around the clock, so should I.”
- “The needs of survivors are more important than the needs of helpers.”
- “I can contribute the most by working all the time.”
- “Only I can do x, y, and z.”
Provider Care: Following Disaster Response

- Expect a readjustment period upon returning home
- Discuss the situation with coworkers and management
- Participate in formal help if extreme stress persists
- Ask help in parenting, if you feel irritable or have difficulties adjusting
• Prepare for worldview changes that may not be mirrored by others in your life
• Increase experiences that have spiritual or philosophical meaning to you
• Always remember to keep First Things First and take care of You
Core Action #1: Contact and Engagement

- Establish a connection with survivors in a non-intrusive and compassionate manner
  - Introduce yourself and describe your role
  - Ask for permission to talk
  - Explain objectives
  - Ask about immediate needs
Core Action #2: Safety and Comfort

• The goal is to enhance immediate and ongoing safety and provide physical and emotional comfort
Acutely Bereaved Individuals

- Listen carefully with sympathy
- Be informed about cultural norms
- Know that grief reactions vary from person to person
- Help family members to respect differences in grieving
Grief and Spiritual Issues

- Ask survivors if they have religious/spiritual needs
- Refer them to a clergy member of their choice
- Do not judge, contradict, or correct what they say about their religious beliefs
- If survivors want to pray, help them find a suitable place
Core Action #3: Stabilization

- The goal is to calm and orient emotionally-overwhelmed and distraught survivors
Signs a Person May Need Stabilization

- Glassy eyed and vacant
- Unresponsive
- Disoriented
- Exhibiting strong emotional responses
- Uncontrollable physical reactions
- Frantic searching behavior
Core Action #3: Stabilization

Grounding

- Ask the person to:
  - Listen to and look at you
  - Orient him/herself to the surroundings
  - Talk about the aspect of the situation that is under control, hopeful, or positive
  - Breathe in and out slowly and deeply
  - Name five **non-distressing** things he/she can see, hear, and feel
Core Action #4: Information Gathering

- The goal is to identify immediate needs and concerns, gather additional information, and tailor PFA interventions.
- It is used to determine:
  - Need for immediate referral
  - Need for any additional available ancillary services
  - Which components of PFA may be helpful
Core Action #5: Practical Assistance

• Offer practical help to survivors in addressing immediate needs and concerns
  – Identify the most immediate need
  – Clarify the need
  – Discuss an action response
  – Act to address the need
Core Action #6: Connection with Social Support

- The goal is to help establish brief or ongoing contacts with primary support persons, such as family members and friends, and to seek out other sources of support.
Core Action #7: Information on Coping

• Provide information about stress reactions and coping to reduce distress and promote adaptive functioning
  – Explain what is currently known about the event
  – Inform survivors of available resources
  – Identify the post-disaster reactions and how to manage them
  – Promote and support self-care and family care practices
Core Action #8: Linkage with Collaborative Services

• The goal is to link survivors with available services needed immediately or in the future
Agencies Providing Services

• Reconnect survivors to agencies that provided them services before the disaster:
  – Mental health services
  – Medical services
  – Spiritual support
  – Alternative healers
  – Child welfare services
  – Schools
  – Drug and alcohol support groups
Be well, Be safe

- First Things First
- Easy Does It
- Comfort, Care, Safety, Stabilization, Security
- Use the “buddy system”

THANK YOU FOR YOUR SERVICE!
How Do We Know How to Respond Following Disasters?

- Customer Feedback
- Disaster Research
- Program Evaluation
- Trauma Research
- Expert Consensus
- Experience
Five Empirically-Supported Early Intervention Principles

- Hope
- Safety
- Self & Community Efficacy
- Calming
- Connectedness
Psychological First Aid Authors

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