

Psychological First Aid – What to Do

1. Make a Connection

- a. Introduce yourself.
- b. Be fully present.

2. Be Kind, Calm, and Compassionate

- a. Express patience and compassion, even if people are being difficult.
- b. Speak in a calm voice.
- c. Remain courteous and respectful of people.
- d. Pay attention to cultural appropriateness of physical proximity, eye contact, and gestures

3. Meet People's Basic Needs

- a. Offer or direct them to food and water.
- b. Provide or direct them to a safe place.
- c. Check to see if family, friends, or peers are available.
- d. Encourage them to promote their self-care such as getting sleep, rest, and nutrition.
(e.g. take a break, moderate exercise)
- e. Guide them to the next level of care as needed.

4. Listening

- a. Be attentive.
- b. Tune in to where the person is.
- c. Observe body language for cues.
- d. Listen carefully.
- e. Reflect back what the person is saying so that they know you are truly hearing them.
- f. Be available.

5. Give Realistic Reassurance

- a. Help the person to feel less anxious or worried by letting them know that what they are feelings is understandable.
- b. Do NOT promise what you cannot deliver.

6. Encourage Good Coping Skills

7. Help People Connect

- a. Get them access to a phone so that they can contact their loved ones.
- b. Suggest additional methods of communication such as texting and/or email.
- c. Guide the person to the appropriate sources or resources for information in your setting including where and how to make a referral.

8. Ending the Conversation

- a. Ask if there is anything else you can to assist her or him.
- b. Provide the person with phone numbers, handouts, and or relevant contact information of additional resources for follow-up and possible referral to next level of care.

CRISIS INTERVENTION: WHAT IS NOT HELPFUL

- 1. INUNDATING THEM WITH INFORMATION:** People in crisis have a limited capacity to assimilate information. After they have reached their limit, giving them too much information only serves to be confusing and overwhelming.
- 2. GIVING THEM TASKS THEY ARE NOT READY FOR:** People in crisis can usually only do one thing at a time. They need to be validated and praised authentically for accomplishing even the smallest of productive tasks.
- 3. SAYING, “I KNOW HOW YOU FEEL” or “I UNDERSTAND” WHEN YOU MAY NOT KNOW AT ALL HOW THEY FEEL.** Reactions and feelings are unique to each individual and personal to them. Even if you have experienced a trauma, you never really fully understand another person’s feelings. Victims may find these statements insensitive, even though they are meant with good intentions.
- 4. INTERRUPTING:** Often times victims need to vent or ramble to clear their Thoughts and begin to re-establish some sense of control before they can move on to more structured conversations.
- 5. SPECULATING ABOUT THINGS YOU ARE NOT SURE ABOUT:** People In crisis hear what you say as “fact”. Erroneous information may lead to secondary traumatization. This is especially true if there is a criminal investigation or the medical condition of a loved one has not been completely determined yet. Be very careful about what information you impart. Do not give false hope.
- 6. PROLONGING DEPENDENCE ON YOU:** As soon as possible, help Victims and survivors transfer their interactions to those people who are near them in the future. Remember that any assistance you offer should be to facilitate their independence. This can be very difficult, especially if you as a responder feel attached to the victim. Emotions – yours and theirs – run high during a crisis. It can be very difficult to separate your needs from those of the victim. However, it is vital that your focus stays on their needs solely. Your emotional needs have to be met as well, but this needs to be done by you obtaining support from others.
- 7. DISCOURAGING ANY EMOTIONS, ESPECIALLY IF THEY ARE UNUSUAL OR FRIGHTENING TO YOU:** People in crisis demonstrate a broad array of emotions and behaviors that may be unfamiliar to you. As long as they are not engaging in dangerous behaviors towards themselves and/or others, allow their emotions to take their natural course.
- 8. INSISTING THAT THEY TALK TO YOU:** Sometimes people just do not want to talk with a counselor, or they are not ready to do so. You must respect this. They may be ready later. If they need to be alone, allow them the space to do so safely. Make sure they have referrals in case they change their mind.