



Psychological First Aid

General Guidelines for Addressing Mental Health Needs in the School Environment

Psychological First Aid (PFA)* is an evidence-informed approach for assisting children, adolescents, adults, and families in the immediate aftermath of a stressful life event, such as a disaster, school crisis, or emergency. PFA is designed to reduce the initial distress caused by traumatic events and to foster short and long-term adaptive functioning.

LISTEN to what they say and how they act.

- Address the feeling(s)/behavior(s) as soon as possible.
- If a student wants to talk, be prepared to listen and focus on what they say and how you can be of help.
- Observe nonverbal communication. Remember that student(s) may also show their feelings in nonverbal ways, such as increased behavioral problems or increased withdrawal.
- Express compassion and calmness in your voice and body language.

PROTECT by maintaining structure, stability, and consistency.

- Maintain daily routines, activities, and structure, with clear expectations and consistent rules.
- Provide supervision and consistency to encourage successful outcomes.
- Monitor conversations that students may engage in or hear.
- Provide accurate and age-appropriate information.
- Keep the environment free of anything that could re-traumatize the child.
- Validate the student's life experience.
- Maintain confidentiality as appropriate.



CONNECT through interaction, activities, and resources.

- Check-in with student(s) on a regular basis.
- Become familiar with your learning support staff (e.g., psychiatric social worker, school psychologist, counselor, nurse) and community health/mental health services. Make referrals to the appropriate resources.
- Encourage interactions, activities, and team projects with friends and teachers.
- Keep communication open with others involved in the students' lives (e.g., parents, teachers, coaches).
- **Note:** Contact the appropriate child protective services agency if you suspect child abuse and/or neglect.

MODEL calm and optimistic behavior.

- Model healthy responses by remaining calm, courteous, organized, and helpful.
- Pay attention to your thoughts, feelings, and responses, as they may influence how students cope and behave.
- Take constructive actions to assure safety.
- Acknowledge the difficulty of the situation and demonstrate how people can support one another to cope after a crisis.
- Practice self-care.

TEACH about normal changes that can occur in the aftermath of a stressful life event.

- Student(s) may have different reactions to the same event.
- Encourage students to identify and use positive coping strategies to help them after the event.
- Help students identify trusted adults at school and in their home community.
- Help students set small "doable" goals and share in these achievements as "wins."

*The PFA: Listen, Protect, Connect Model was created in partnership by UCLA Center for Public Health and Disasters, LAUSD Trauma Services Adaptation Center and the National Center for the School Crisis and Bereavement. The authors M. Schreiber, R. Gurwitsch, and M. Wong have authorized this adaptation.