

Psychological First Aid

Covid-19 guide

Since the Covid-19 global pandemic, the world has been going through a stressful time. Life is very different from usual and we are all in the process of adjusting to and making sense of our new circumstances.

Many people may feel more anxious than usual. Most of us will recover naturally from the shock of such health crises and will not need formal psychological assistance to do so. Every person has strengths and abilities that can help them cope with life's challenges.

However, some people are particularly vulnerable in a crisis and may need extra help. This includes those who may be at risk or need support because of their age (children, older people), they have a mental or physical disability, or they belong to groups who may be marginalised or targeted for violence.

Psychological First aid provides a framework for supporting people who have witnessed a distressing event. Evidence (according to various studies and the consensus of many crisis helpers) tells us that people are more likely to be able to cope with and recover from ongoing situations like Covid-19 if they:

- Feel safe, connected to others, calm and helpful
- Have access to social, physical and emotional support
- Feel able to help themselves, as individuals and communities

PFA may be a useful tool for staff supporting children and young people and this is a guide to using it with this group.

What is Psychological First Aid

- A reliance-focused, supportive five-step framework. The World Health Organisation recommends it as the most appropriate way to help people recently affected by traumatic crisis.
- It is suitable for use with everyone in the first days, weeks and months after a crisis.
- It can be delivered by anyone in a support role and is comparable to providing first aid for physical wounds.
- It involves comforting and listening to people, but not pressuring them to talk, and helping them to feel calm and connect to information.

What Psychological First Aid is not

- It is not something that only professionals can deliver.
- It is not professional counselling.
- It is not 'psychological debriefing' in that PFA does not necessarily involve a detailed discussion of the event that caused the distress.
- It is not asking someone to analyse what happened to them or to put time and events in order.
- Although PFA involves being available to listen to people's stories, it is not about pressuring them to tell you their feelings and reactions to an event.

Delivering psychological first aid

Children and young people will reflect the emotional responses of those around them. Before you start, take a moment to 'check in with yourself' and ensure that you feel calm and clear about what you want to achieve with this intervention. Taking a few slow deep breaths and reminding yourself of the key messages you need to deliver will help you provide PFA effectively.

The seven components of PFA

