Community-Based Psychological First Aid Training: Mitigating Conflict via Early Mental Health Interventions

INSTRUCTOR’S MANUAL

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“Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.”

- Martin Luther King, Jr.
Community-Based Psychological First Aid Training: Mitigating Conflict via Early Mental Health Interventions

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Note to Participants:

Thank you for participating in this project! The goal of the initial workshop is to teach you how to deliver Psychological First Aid to people in need during or after a crisis or emergency, and also to train you how to teach others in your community to deliver Psychological First Aid themselves. This will provide people throughout the region with helpful coping skills which we hope will give them better alternatives than turning to hostility, violence, or drug and other substances abuse when problems occur.

The workshop that you will deliver in your community will use PowerPoint slides in Arabic or Hebrew. This written manual will provide more detailed information than what is included in the slides so you can feel confident that you really understand the material before you teach it. You will see that there is a picture of each slide (in English) next to the related information. In some places there will be a special “Teaching Tip” with suggestions about something specific you should do or say at that time when you are leading the workshop. This manual also includes an exercise you will use during the training so people can practice their new skills. A resource list on page 29 will help you find good information online if you would like to read more about helping others in times of crisis. There are also suggestions about how to organize and teach the workshop in your community, and an explanation of how to ask participants to complete a short survey before and after the training, so we can see how effective the project is. We hope you will find this manual helpful as you prepare to teach the class.
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Community-Based Psychological First Aid Training:
Mitigating Conflict via Early Mental Health Interventions

Introduction

Teaching Tip: It is usually a good idea to have participants introduce themselves so they feel comfortable working together, but you should use your judgment and not ask them to do that if the group is too large or you think people would be rather not say their name. Of course you should still introduce yourself, and explain why you are asking them to complete the survey before and after the workshop. Please be sure to mention that this project was funded by the United States Agency for International Development.

Instructions for Using the Customer Satisfaction Survey

Hand out the pre and post evaluations to the group. Help them to feel comfortable about completing them and assure them that all results are anonymous and that only the group results will be reported. The purpose of the surveys is to see if the training was useful or helpful. Ask them to complete the pre-test before the training begins and then have them turn the sheet over until the training ends. Have them complete the post-test after you complete your training. Collect both sheets after you are done and place them in a sealed envelope to return.

What You Will Learn Today

Teaching Tip: Read through this brief outline so participants understand what will be taught in the workshop.
Some Definitions

**Crisis:**
Throughout the training we will be referring to very stressful events. These stressful events can sometimes be disasters, emergencies, conflicts or even war. However, for the most part, we will use the broad term “crisis” to refer to such events. A crisis generates danger or difficulty and overwhelms an individual’s resources and coping mechanisms. It creates a time of instability as the person struggles to regain his or her balance.

**Survivor:**
Emergencies, disasters and crises are events. Throughout this manual and training we will refer to anyone who has been affected or impacted by such an event as a survivor.

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**YOU CAN HELP!**
In difficult times, friends, family and neighbors can help each other.

Understanding and practicing Psychological First Aid will allow you to be a more effective helper for people in your community.

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**The Importance of Community Support**

- Crises, disasters and violence lead to extreme stress for the people who experience them.
- The impact of stressful events can last for a very long time.
- BUT the stress can often be reduced if survivors get help during and right after the event. This can restore people’s trust:
  - In themselves
  - In the world
  - In others

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You Can Help!

Helping neighbors and family members during or after a crisis is challenging. Survivors can display shock and extreme feelings, and sometimes people turn to violence or use drugs or other substances when they feel a lot of stress. Most people recover on their own, but everyone in a community can learn to help each other and to develop better ways of coping with stress. That is the purpose of Psychological First Aid (PFA), which will teach you how to support your family members and neighbors in times of trouble.

If you keep the principles and practices of PFA in mind during or after a crisis, you can provide effective assistance. Like any type of First Aid, PFA can be learned and practiced by non-professionals. It can prevent long-term problems and promote healing. This workshop will give you the skills to provide PFA to the people around you.

The Importance of Community Support

When people go through difficult times, it is natural to feel upset and stressed, and sometimes those feelings can last a long time after an event is over. It is also extremely stressful to live in conditions where conflict or violence is always possible because people never really feel safe. However, one thing that can reduce stress reactions is receiving help from others, especially those they trust like family members, neighbors, and religious leaders. This can reassure us that we have people who care about us, that not everyone in the world wants to harm us, and that we have the strength to keep functioning.
That is the goal of PFA: It gives ordinary people the skills they need to assist others in their neighborhood, which reminds those who are suffering that they are members of a community and that others are there to share their losses and support their recovery.

**Teaching Tip:** Before you go to the next section, explain that before you start teaching them PFA, you will talk about what makes some experiences so stressful and how people usually react to these experiences. Understanding the source of these reactions is important so they can learn how to help decrease them.

### Reactions to Crises and Disasters

It might seem like the most important predictor of stress reactions is the type of event – for example, was it a bus accident or a wildfire? However, research on disasters, wars, and ongoing conflict show that the actual event does not matter as much as the characteristics of the event, such as size, cause, and timing.

### Crisis/Disaster Size

We can think of size in three ways, which are often related.

First, how **big** was or is the problem? This will determine the number of people impacted, and how widely the whole community is affected. That can influence how much help is available and how quickly recovery can proceed. In a very large crisis, people may be unable to turn to their normal support systems of friends, family, and neighbors as they would after a smaller scale traumatic event, since those people may be dealing with their own recovery needs. If an entire neighborhood is affected, people may not be able to shop, work, or go to school. Many may be forced to relocate in order to find housing, work, and schools, which adds the emotional stress of resettling and losing one’s community on top of the direct disaster losses.

Second, how **bad** was it in terms of injuries and deaths? Of course, any serious injury or loss of life is terrible, but events that cause multiple losses can cause worse distress for everyone involved, including professional responders who may suffer from seeing many injured people or dead bodies.

Third, how **long** did it last – or is it still happening? It is usually easier for people to recover from an event that is clearly
finished since after some time they can begin to feel safe again, which makes them less stressed. It is much more difficult when a problem is still happening, or there is a lot of fear that it will happen again.

All three measures of size are important because the more suffering a person experiences, the worse his or her stress reaction tends to be. Therefore, people whose experience in a crisis was particularly intense or long lasting are likely to require more support than those who received a smaller dose of trauma.

### Crisis/Disaster Cause

We usually think of disasters as either natural or human-caused. However, it is not always so simple since natural events can trigger technical disasters (like an earthquake destroying an industrial plant that then emits toxic fumes), and human-created conditions can limit or increase damage resulting from natural events (like when good building practices can prevent a house from falling down after an earthquake). Of course, ongoing events like wars and political conflict are always human-caused.

In general, people usually have an easier time recovering emotionally from **natural disasters** such as weather events. These events are recognized as unpreventable and not any human’s responsibility. There is no one to blame, except possibly G_d or a higher power, so adjustment is often faster because survivors do not typically have anger or a desire for revenge in addition to their losses. However, survivors of natural disasters may feel helpless and unable to protect themselves in the future, which can be very distressing.

**Human-caused events**, including transportation disasters and industrial accidents as well as intentional acts of violence, are generally associated with more distress among survivors. Realistically or not, these events are often seen as preventable, so survivors experience anger, plus a strong need to find someone to blame. They want to find whoever is responsible and punish them, but this is often not possible and leads to further stress and violence. This can be viewed as a way of trying to cope: Finding someone to blame and punish gives survivors a belief they can prevent the event from happening again, as well as a sense that someone can be made to pay for their losses. However, it can also make people so focused on their anger and need for justice that they do not come to terms with their losses and get stuck in their recovery process. If survivors perceive that justice is not being done, they may lose faith in humanity in general. Those with strong religious
beliefs may feel bad for questioning how G_d could let this happen. Therefore, community members who experienced human-caused events, especially intentional violence, should be viewed as being at high risk of serious stress reactions and given as much support as possible.

Was It Expected or Not?

Sometimes we know about possible danger a few days in advance, sometimes we receive an alarm minutes before an event, and sometimes we receive no warning at all. When people are informed about a problem early, they may be able to protect themselves by leaving the area, going to a shelter, or taking some other action that decreases the amount of harm they experience, which also usually means they have less stress reactions later. It can also be helpful to have time to mentally prepare for something bad rather than being surprised by it.

However, receiving a warning means people have to make a decision about whether to follow it, which usually involves some unpleasant action like leaving home. If people receive a warning and they fail to take action, they are likely to experience guilt and shame later because they know they could have avoided some losses. Survivors may then blame themselves, and they may experience blame by others who question why they did not follow the warning.

If an event is not expected, or there is not enough time to do anything to protect themselves, people have no chance to prepare physically or mentally. They are more likely to be overwhelmed during and after the event. They also may feel helpless or vulnerable: If a traumatic event occurred once with no warning and with nothing they could do to prevent it, it can happen again and there is no way to protect oneself or one’s family in the future.

There should be less guilt in this group since there was no warning to respond to and so no need to blame oneself for failing to act. However, people often feel guilt over things they could not realistically have expected or controlled, such as “I should have seen it coming,” “We never should have bought that house,” “I should not have let him get on that bus,” and so on. Even if these thoughts are not realistic, they still cause very real pain.
Crisis/Disaster Timing

A final characteristic to consider is when the event happened, which can influence how bad it is, how quickly help is received, and the distress it produces.

Time of day obviously determines whether it is light or dark during the event and can influence the first response and recovery efforts. Especially if electrical power is lost, darkness can increase the risk of injuries and complicate rescue activities. It can also cause confusion and increase fear and anxiety as people try to help each other or wait for assistance. Fear about an event happening at night can keep people from sleeping, which then makes them less able to function during the day. On the positive side, families are more likely to be together at night, not separated at work and school. Being separated during a crisis is very stressful for both parents and children.

Season is directly connected with certain kinds of disasters (heat waves, wind storms), but season and weather can also cause more suffering, especially if it is very cold and people do not have the right clothing or shelter, or very hot and people do not have enough water or protection from the sun.

Teaching Tip: At this time you can bring together the last several slides by reminding participants that those characteristics of size, cause, if there was a warning, and timing, all influence the experience a person had during and after an event, and that experience is part of what determines how strong their stress reaction will be and how much help they might need. Reactions are also influenced by two other things that you’ll talk about next, who was impacted and what support did they receive.

Who Was Impacted?

Every person who goes through a very difficult experience is likely to have some kind of stress reaction later. That is just a natural response. But research shows that there are certain groups of people who are likely to have a stronger bad reaction, and who could benefit from receiving more support. When offering help, you should consider:

Age: Children are clearly more vulnerable in times of crisis or disaster. They are more at risk of physical injury, and they are also very dependent on adults to take care of their emotional needs. If caregivers are unable to meet those needs because of their own distress, children risk lasting developmental problems. We will discuss how to help children later in this workshop. Older adults also may be at risk for strong reactions since they may have health problems that make it harder to cope. However, they also may have great strength and wisdom that could help others in times of crisis.
Gender and family role: Women often show more distress than men, especially mothers who are trying to protect their children, their husband, and possibly their parents and other older relatives.

Amount of exposure: This goes back to the measures of event size discussed earlier. If a person was very close to what happened, or felt unsafe for a long time, he or she is likely to have a stronger reaction.

Loss of family member, home, or possessions: Of course the death or injury of a family member is likely to cause great distress for any survivor, so people who experience this loss should receive as much support as possible. Losing a home is also a terrible experience, especially if it is not possible to rebuild and a family has to relocate.

Pre-disaster stress: In general, if the person was already having other problems before this crisis, they may find it harder to recover since they were starting from a more difficult position.

Lack of resources: If people did not have much social, financial, or personal support before the crisis, or if they had that support but lost it during the crisis, they will generally have trouble recovering because they have fewer tools to assist them with both practical and emotional needs.

What Help Did People Receive

Another important question is how much support and assistance people received after a difficult experience. At the basic level, were essential practical needs for things like food, shelter, and medical care met? When we are hungry, sick, or worried about where we will sleep it is very difficult to think about anything else. On the other hand, when other people step forward to help meet those needs, it reminds us that we are not alone and that most people are good. That is why meeting physical and safety needs are included in PFA.

Once basic needs are taken care of, we can start to think about emotional needs, whether that it is in the form of listening to someone’s story or providing professional care for people with very strong reactions. People who feel their needs are not recognized will have a more difficult time recovering, and it is especially problematic if they feel others are blaming them for their misfortune.
Reactions to Stress

As this picture shows, the way any one survivor reacts to a difficult experience comes from a combination of characteristics of the disaster or crisis (that is, size, cause, expectedness, and timing), the individual (age, strength of support network, amount of exposure, and the other points shown on slide 11), and the response (were they supported, ignored, or blamed). This is important for helpers to understand because it means that not everyone who went through the same event will have the same reactions, so we always need to treat people as individuals and be sure to understand what that specific person is feeling.

■ **Teaching Tip:** This is a good time to ask if people have any questions before you move on to describing common reactions to stressful events.

Common Reactions

As we said earlier, almost everyone who goes through a frightening or stressful event is likely to develop some negative reactions in one or more of these areas. This is a natural response to a bad experience and it does not mean the person is sick or will feel this way forever. Each person will have a different combination of symptoms, and these are likely to change over time. Sometimes people have a symptom – for example, pain in the head or stomach, or not being able to think clearly – and do not even recognize that it is because of stress, so it can be helpful to teach people to be aware of their own feelings and how they are related to the crisis.

■ **Teaching Tip:** Recommend that as you go through the next group of slides, participants think about which symptoms they usually feel in times of stress.

Reactions: Physical

Many people express their stress through their bodies, including physical pain, not being hungry (or eating too much), or wanting to smoke or use other substances. It is very common for upset people to have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep – or they may feel tired all the time and want to sleep a lot.
Reactions: Emotional
Some common emotional reactions make a person turn inside themselves, feeling sad, depressed, guilty, or hopeless. Other feelings get directed at other people through anger, blaming, or impatience. Often stressed people go back and forth between these kinds of feelings (mood swings), and some feel numb, with no emotions at all.

Reactions: Thinking
When someone’s brain is busy trying to make sense of a difficult experience, regular thinking is often impacted. People may be surprised at this and may not understand why they cannot concentrate or remember like usual, and they may not recognize that they are not thinking clearly about what happened.

Reactions: Behavioral
All of these other reactions also change the way people act, especially towards others. Some people do not want to be around others so they withdraw and try to be alone, or spend all their time working. Others criticize or bully those around them. Many stressed people try to avoid anything that will remind them of the event, so they may not go to certain places, not watch television, or make other changes so they do not have to remember what happened.

Reactions: Spiritual
After a bad event, many people find comfort in religion, believing it must be G_d’s will. Others find it hard to understand how G_d could have let something terrible happen, and that confusion can increase their stress. Less religious people can lose their belief that the world is generally safe and that bad things should not happen to good people. These reactions can be very upsetting as they impact a survivor’s core beliefs.
Reactions: Increased Conflict

In general, when we feel a lot of stress it changes the way we view everything around us. We may be so focused on our negative emotions that we do not understand what is causing our own feelings, and we lose the ability to understand and communicate with other people. That can lead to more misunderstandings if we misinterpret what another person is saying or doing and view that person as an enemy, or a source of more problems. This is why it is so important to recognize stress in ourselves, so we can break that cycle of increasing conflict.

Reactions to Loss

While any death can cause shock and sadness, deaths due to disaster or crisis can be harder to accept. One difference is that the surviving people may have experienced the crisis personally, so they are coping with their own traumatic memories in addition to mourning the person who died. Also, if it was a very large event that impacted the whole community, people may be focused on immediate survival needs like finding food and shelter so they cannot think about the loss, and they may not be able to follow traditions. Friends and neighbors who would normally provide practical and emotional support following a death may be preoccupied with their own disaster-related needs, depriving survivors of the comfort of traditional mourning rituals.

Other painful emotions can occur if the survivor feels a lot of anger or blame because the death was human-caused, especially because of intentional violence, or if they feel they could have prevented the death by following a warning or doing something else to protect the person who died. It is also difficult to accept a death that was sudden and unexpected, giving the survivors no time to prepare for the loss. They may think constantly about the last conversation they had before the person died, and what they wish they had said or done before it was too late.

Teaching Tip: This finishes the background information on stress reactions. Before you begin teaching PFA skills, ask if participants now understand why disasters and crises cause these stress reactions and why it is important to help people with them.
Psychological First Aid

Helpful Helping

All of us have been offered help when we were distressed and we have also offered assistance to family members, friends and neighbors we thought were suffering or struggling. Thinking about what we found helpful and not helpful can provide clues as to what you should and should not do when offering assistance. Think of a difficult time in your life and identify someone who helped you through this difficult time. What did this person say that was helpful? What did they do? What did they NOT say and do? What qualities of the person made them helpful? How did you know this person was helpful? How did you think, feel, or behave differently as a result of the helpfulness? For many people there is a common set of qualities that make for helpful helping.

Teaching Tip: If participants do not mention them, you can note that many people agree that people who are competent, compassionate, honest, collaborative, culturally aware/responsive, calm and courageous, are most helpful. What do you think?

Principles of Helping During or After a Crisis

The actions we can take to establish a positive recovery environment are based on broad principles. There are five essential elements that should be included in any response to crisis. Put into action, these principles can improve the lives of survivors.

- **Promote Safety:** After a crisis, in order to reduce the physical responses to fear and anxiety, you should do all you can to promote safety by removing actual or perceived threats. If the threat is ongoing you should do all you can to reduce the danger and encourage safety.

- **Promote Calming:** Anxiety and distress are typical and understandable responses to crisis, but once the immediate danger has passed, high anxiety or arousal can become a problem. You can promote calm by serving as a role model, reassuring survivors that it is safe for them to relax or lower their arousal levels. Even if the danger is ongoing, when there is relative peace, remind neighbors to relax.
• **Promote Confidence:** Crises can cause survivors to feel helpless and powerless. Promoting confidence and competence can begin with restoring a survivor’s ability to take control over their own negative emotions and solve practical problems. It can also include helping with community activities like mourning rituals or getting children back to school. Confidence and competency is promoted by encouraging survivors to take as much control as possible over their own actions and decision-making.

• **Promote Connectedness:** Your presence is one important connection. However it is most important that you promote connections between survivors and their natural support system. You should do all you can to connect children with parents and neighbors with neighbors. Remind survivors to talk with and stay connected to family and friends.

• **Promote Hope:** Hope could be the belief that one’s actions can bring about a positive change. For some, hope involves a belief that luck or the government will address needs. For many, hope arises through a belief in G_d or a higher power. Your realistic hopefulness that the situation can improve or that recovery is possible provides an effective role model.

How can these principles be applied to assist survivors of crisis or violence? In fact, they provide the theoretical basis of Psychological First Aid.

**Psychological First Aid**

According to the World Health Organization (2011), “Psychological First Aid describes a humane, supportive response to a fellow human being who is suffering from a serious crisis event and who may need support.”
Purpose of PFA

PFA interventions are meant to address the interrelated practical, physical, and psychological needs of survivors, making it consistent with the principles described above. PFA’s premise is that attending to basic needs (i.e., providing food and water; restoring a sense of calm, safety and hope; connecting survivors with a source of social support; providing information and psychoeducation) as quickly as possible after someone experiences a traumatic event will help to lower their stress level and prevent them from developing long-term negative emotional reactions, just as receiving prompt medical treatment for a wound can prevent it from becoming infected.

Elements of PFA

PFA is not a process, but a toolkit of actions you can use as needed, in any order.

Model Calm

One core aim of PFA is to reduce the physical and emotional arousal that is increased by the crisis. Because emotions are contagious you can reduce a person’s stress level by maintaining a calm presence. It is important to be calm without being emotionally distant and to remain steady in order to help survivors begin to feel more in control. Remember to breathe.

Provide Warmth and Recognition

Crises and violence can shake survivors’ trust in humanity. You can help to restore that trust by being thoughtful, patient, and kind. Compassion and kindness are expressed in paying attention to the person, speaking in a soothing tone of voice, and accepting anything the survivor says. Accepting and understanding survivors’ feelings does not mean you should support inappropriate or unhelpful actions. While you want to help survivors to remain calm, you should not minimize the seriousness of the situation. Survivors need recognition that they are in a very difficult situation or that they have experienced a trauma and their stress reactions are understandable and to be expected. If the seriousness of the trauma is downplayed, survivors may not take the necessary time to rest and recover.
Listen

If survivors want to describe what happened to them, be prepared to listen. Do not pressure people to talk if they do not want to. Listen to both thoughts and feelings. Be ready to listen to survivors’ feelings of pain or loss or rage or shock without getting overwhelmed yourself or changing the subject. Do not leave survivors alone if their feelings are very strong. Make sure they are with a family member, spiritual leader, or other supportive person.

Things to Say to Show You Are Listening

- “So you feel...”
- “I hear you saying...”
- “I sense you are feeling...”
- “You appear...”
- “It seems to you...”
- “So tell me if I am getting this right? You seem to be feeling that...”

Be Honest and Trustworthy

Only honest and genuine caring and listening is helpful for survivors. Being truthful does not mean being blunt or rude. Know your own limits so you can take a rest or break when you need to. Do not try to care for others when you are exhausted. Do not repeat or gossip about what you hear.

Help Survivors to Help Themselves

Support survivors’ strength, courage and power so they can begin to regain a sense of control. If they are able, survivors can be encouraged to participate in helping others. Ask: “How have you gotten through tough times before?” or “What skills do you have that will allow you to get through this?” Allow survivors to determine the kind of assistance they receive and how much they want to talk about the event.

Listen

If survivors want to describe what happened to them, be prepared to listen. Concentrate and pay attention to all aspects of the survivor’s communication - both the thoughts and feelings. Respond by restating or reflecting on what the survivor said with statements such as “I hear you saying...” or “So you think that...”. Such “active listening” allows survivors to feel known and understood which can help them to cope with current stressors or to heal from one that passed. Do not change the subject if survivors want to talk about their pain and do not leave survivors alone if they are not able to manage their feelings. Be sure they have the company of a trusted friend, family member, or spiritual leader. The act of listening is very important in the helping relationship. Do not feel like you need to fill all silence with words. Be present and listen.

Be Honest and Trustworthy

It is not easy to be warm and a good listener if you are exhausted or impatient. A fake smile is not helpful. Only honest empathy and warmth are helpful for survivors. Honesty does not mean being cruel or insensitive. You also have to care for yourself in order to take care of others. Know your limits so you can stay honestly connected and warmly engaged. You can only be a trusted helper if you do not repeat what you are told in confidence and resist the temptation to gossip or spread rumors.

Help Survivors to Help Themselves

At the same time that you acknowledge the vulnerability of friends and family members under stress or experiencing fear or loss, it is also important to support their ability to be strong and to bounce back from hardship. Acknowledging and supporting a survivor’s strength, competence, courage, and power can begin to restore a sense of control. Allow survivors to determine the kind of assistance they receive and how much they tell you about their experience. Ask: “How have you gotten through tough times before?” or “What skills do you have that will allow you to get through this?” It is often helpful for survivors to continue normal work routines so they feel useful even in difficult circumstances. It might also be helpful for them to contribute to helping others. Sometimes survivors gain a false sense of usefulness or power by planning revenge or violence. This is understandable when people feel helpless, but should be strongly discouraged as violence only leads to more violence.
Community-Based Psychological First Aid

Attend to Safety Needs
Survivors will recover much more quickly if they feel safe. They also need to feel that their loved ones are safe and out of danger. You should do all that you can to ensure that survivors and their loved ones are as safe as they can be during or after a crisis or disaster. Protect survivors from any threat or danger from the ongoing crisis, especially those who may be so disoriented that they are not able to care for themselves. There are situations where it is impossible to provide complete safety, but trying to do so should have the highest priority.

Attend to Physical Needs
In the middle of a crisis or emergency we might forget that survivors need basic necessities. Be sure to offer food or drink if you think the survivor might be hungry or thirsty. Pay attention to temperature, doing what you can to keep the survivor from being too cold or hot. If you hear or observe that people are injured or ill you should do what you can to get them medical attention. Help survivors to find basic necessities such as food, water or shelter. If the crisis is a medical emergency such as a disease that is spreading, while it is important to be empathetic and calm, it is more important to do all you can to ensure the physical health of survivors. This may involve finding out where to get vaccines or medication.

Provide Information and Direction to Services
Accurate information is an important remedy for the uncertainty and anxiety that survivors experience during or following a crisis. Survivors want and need different kinds of information (what happened, who was affected, where can they get help). If possible, provide lists of available resources. One category of information is more urgent than any other: when loved ones are missing. Family members in this category will want frequent updates about what happened and what is being done to search for the missing person. Even when there is little hope that a person will be found alive, relatives still may want details about the recovery process.

Remember that whether the information you are providing is about a missing loved one or a more routine matter, it is important that all communication be in simple language. The stress of a crisis can impair the ability to think, so you need to be certain that the information you provide is understood. You
may need to summarize or review what you say, or provide it in writing as well as verbally.

Keep in mind that when there is a crisis there are likely to be rumors. When people are stressed or upset they can believe things they would otherwise question or be sceptical about. Rumors can be dangerous for a great many reasons. For example, a rumor can encourage blaming innocent people or cause survivors to flee an area that is safe but rumored to be unsafe. Therefore it is important for you to warn survivors how common rumors are and to encourage them to not accept or spread what might be false information. It is most important that you, the helper, share only information that you are certain is true.

### Psychoeducation

Providing psychoeducation means informing people about why they experience stress reactions and what they can do about them. There are many places (such as a community center, place of worship, or school) where you can provide accurate information or education to survivors. You might be able to distribute flyers or leaflets about how to deal with stress or how to help children cope with stress. Survivors sometimes think they are going crazy when under stress or think they will never recover. You can reassure them that they are experiencing an understandable reaction to an unusual event. This type of psychoeducation is sometimes referred to as “normalizing” a stress reaction. You can also discuss stress management and stress reduction by teaching effective coping mechanisms and promoting awareness of ineffective coping mechanisms.

**Teaching Tip:** Ask participants what they do to cope with stress. Ask them to mention their own effective and ineffective ways of coping.

Encourage survivors to do whatever helps them both feel better and function better – for example, suggest that they talk to friends and family, do some physical activity or exercise, write in a journal, relax or engage in spiritual or religious practice. Discourage them from overworking, not getting enough rest or sleep, eating too much or too little, watching too much television, smoking or using other substances, or attempting to regain a sense of control by bullying those around them.
Help Survivors Connect

Social support can be expressed in different ways, but all can help a survivor to cope with the stress of crisis or tragedy. **Practical support** can take the form of money or help with tasks and chores. Survivors might need practical help repairing their homes, arranging travel, or doing needed paperwork. **Emotional support** provides a survivor with warmth, caring, understanding, or acceptance, and a sense that they are valued and important. **Informational support** can include advice that is intended to help survivors cope with difficult circumstances. While you may be able to provide all three forms of support directly, you should also encourage survivors to seek it from neighbors, friends, and family members. These personal connections can be valuable resources in providing accurate information on local conditions (such as where to obtain medical care, which roads are closed, where to obtain fuel or other supplies, if business hours have changed, and so on), as well as sources of comfort and solidarity. Clergy, spiritual leaders, or family leaders as well and family and friends can offer guidance and comfort.

Help Survivors Avoid Negative Connections

Do not make the mistake of urging survivors to contact family and friends without being sure that these contacts will be trustworthy and helpful. Remember that not all relationships are supportive – in fact, some family members can be significant sources of stress and misery.

Assist Survivors after a Death

For many of us, being with a neighbor or friend who has just lost a loved one is the most challenging experience we ever face. Sometime there can be practical problems. You might help with tasks such as identifying remains, making funeral arrangements, or contacting family members. Although this assistance is practical it is also a form of PFA since receiving accurate information and practical help is comforting. Support for those who are grieving often does not involve any problem solving. You might say “I am so sorry for your loss,” “Is there anything I can do for you now?” “Is there someone you would like me to call?” “Do you need me to notify anyone?” As a supportive presence you can offer much comfort. Bereaved people are often very thankful if you simply provide a visible but quiet presence. Many who have lost a loved one can be helped if you connect them with spiritual or family leaders, but do not invite them to the home of the bereaved without asking permission.
Help Survivors to Manage Conflict

In the section on reactions we pointed out that stress has been shown to lead to conflict. Those under stress can feel a loss of control and can try to regain it by being aggressive. Stress can lead to frustration and intolerance that can then be directed towards friends, family members, and others who are not to blame. Stress and crisis can also lead to scapegoating (putting blame on someone who is not actually responsible) and violence.

It is therefore extremely important to remind survivors of the importance of managing conflict. Conflict is decreased when survivors can manage stress effectively using positive coping mechanisms. People who are calm in crisis are less likely to act impulsively and make trouble for themselves and others. People who use ineffective coping mechanisms such as consuming illegal drugs or other substances are more likely to hurt themselves or someone else. Helpers should remind survivors that during or after a crisis, not only is the survivor him- or herself upset, but also many other people could be suffering and so it is important to pay attention to the feelings of others.

Even if the survivor is distressed or unhappy it is important to recognize and respond to the things that matter to the other family members and the community. Helpers can remind survivors of the importance of distinguishing between angry feelings that are understandable and violent actions that are destructive. At the same time that it is okay to feel angry at times it is rarely helpful to hold on to resentment and anger. And of course we should discourage survivors from lashing out at innocent family members, bystanders or strangers. All of our moral and ethical teachings emphasize the importance of being aware of and respectful of differences.

Pay Special Attention to or Try to Get More Help for Those Who Are “At Risk”

Over time, the natural resilience of most people allows them to recover after a stressful experience, especially if they receive support and PFA. However, some people may need more than the basic help. How can you best identify these people and ensure that they get the additional help they need? Since emotional reactions can be intense at first, you may have a difficult time sorting out who is showing the most distress from who needs the most help. Here are some risk factors you can
consider in deciding who needs to be more carefully watched or given more support or attention. Did or does the survivor:

- Feel extreme panic?
- Feel a direct threat to his or her own life or the life of a family member?
- See or hear of the death or serious injury of a family member (or lose a loved pet – if culturally relevant)?
- Have a serious illness or injury to him or herself or to a family member?
- Have a family member missing or out of communication?
- Have a home they cannot live in?
- Become separated from his or her family during the event?
- Have a history of mental health care?

If the answer to any of these questions is yes, pay more attention to and monitor the survivor.

The most important risk factor is a positive answer to the following question: “Is the person a danger to self or others?” If you have reason to believe a survivor will injure himself or others, get help immediately! It may be difficult for you to judge how serious a threat someone poses, so it is generally better to be careful and bring in a professional, family leader or clergy rather than risk underreacting. Be alert for behaviors that indicate other serious problems. If you notice significant problems in a person’s thinking (for example, someone who is seeing or hearing things that do not exist), major memory problems, an inability to make simple decisions, or serious withdrawal or aggressive behavior (screaming, threats), get more help as these are not typical reactions to a crisis.

Helping Those with Vulnerabilities

People with vulnerabilities include individuals with mental, physical, or cognitive (thinking) impairments. These individuals require the same assistance as the general population, except they may require some specialized help for the medical condition or impairment.

After a crisis, access to medication, devices (like hearing aids or wheelchairs), or other supports that these individuals may require may not be available. Items may be lost, there may be no power or electricity to run medical devices, and aid organizations may not be open to provide usual support. Many
individuals are able to stay independent in the community because of these supports and without them, they become vulnerable.

It is important to recognize these key supports and plan ahead, if possible, to have access to them during and after a crisis. For example, have at least a week’s supply of medications on hand, have written instructions on how to use devices for others to assist if needed, and be creative in how to meet needs. People with similar impairments are not all the same so it is important to address them as individuals. There is a saying in the disability community: “Nothing about us without us,” meaning that other people should not make decisions about these groups without including them. Be inclusive by planning for all and considering all the needs of the community.

The way you communicate needs should match how individuals are able to receive it. For example, does the person have a hearing impairment? If so, you might need to use a sign language interpreter or use handwritten notes to communicate. Check with the survivor to make sure you are communicating clearly and make adjustments as needed.

For some, assisting individuals with vulnerabilities can seem challenging, requiring some specialized knowledge and patience. This may lead some helpers to be fearful or even resentful of having to work with these individuals. It is important that we help all people, despite our fears, and do the best we can. We just need to recognize our biases and concerns to make sure that they do not impact our ability to assist in or after a crisis, when our assistance is so vital.

Helping Children and Adolescents

Every child is unique and each will respond differently to a crisis situation. In the past, it was believed that children “bounced back” from troubles and were able to take tough times in stride. Although most children are resilient, they are also quite vulnerable and they do experience crisis in a very real way that can have a lasting impact. As helpers we need to be especially observant of children to see if they are showing unusual behaviors (e.g., becoming more “clingy” and not wanting their mother or father out of sight, or becoming more aggressive). These are examples of children who are “acting out” what they are not able to put into words. Adults need to help children to verbalize their needs. These needs will vary and are based on developmental age.

Helping Children and Adolescents

- They need special attention and care, and are not as resilient as you might think.
- Their needs will vary based on developmental age and they may regress to earlier stages in the face of disaster or violence, acting younger than they are or losing skills like toilet training.
- Do provide basic information to young people, but don’t add unnecessary details that may scare them.
- Allow children to talk about the experience if they want to, and provide supportive listening.
- As much as possible, allow them to interact with other children.
- Try to establish routines as quickly as possible, such as regular meal times and school activities.
After a crisis some children regress, acting like they did when they were younger. A usually independent child may become more clingy and dependent, or a child who was already toilet trained may begin to wet the bed at night. Adolescents may become withdrawn.

Reassurance can help a child. Adults need to set limits with children as they normally would, but should also consider what the child has experienced. Adults should provide basic information about the crisis but keep it limited so the child can feel safe. Adults should limit access to the television or internet to reduce the possibility of the child being scared or thinking that the event is occurring over and over.

Do allow the child to talk about their experience but do not allow him or her to dwell for too long. Listen to their concerns, reassure them, and do not minimize their concerns. Sometimes sharing your concerns can help normalize the feelings that the child is having as long as the child remains confident in your ability to keep him or her safe. It is important for children to be with their peers, but they should be watched to ensure they do not share rumors or misinformation that might increase fear and worry. Finally, it has been found returning to a routine is very helpful for children to establish some normalcy to their lives following a crisis. For example, returning to school if possible, regular meal times or bedtimes are comforting to children.

**Teaching Tip:** If you are able to print out copies of the psychoeducation materials on your flash drive to distribute, tell participants you will give them brochures with more details about how to assist children.

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**Take Care of Yourself**

Everyone who helps others in times of crisis or conflict is impacted. You need to be alert for signs of stress and distress in yourself and in other helpers. The core of self-care is effective stress management, which requires continuous attention. Good stress management activities both improve the way you feel and allow you to function more effectively. Ineffective activities (like eating or smoking too much) might make you feel better temporarily, but they do not help you in the long run.

Good self-care strategies include activities that you will do every day, not unrealistic goals you cannot meet. Examine your ways of coping and decide which are effective, which are not, and what you might do to increase the helpful ones. Remember: **Know what works for you, and when you are stressed, remember to do it or do more of it.**
Here is a list of self-care practices that many people find helpful.

- Get enough sleep
- Take regular breaks
- Exercise
- Eat a balanced diet
- Connect with others
- Have some time alone
- Limit TV and internet exposure
- Pray or follow your other usual spiritual practices
- Take the time off that you are given
- Balance giving and receiving support
- Write about your experience in a journal
- Pay attention to the early warning signs of stress
- Use a self-care “buddy” system where you and another helper watch for signs of stress in each other
- Balance work, play, and rest.

And remember: Caring for yourself while helping others does not make you selfish or needy. The care that you provide others can only be as good as the care you provide yourself. See the brochure, Help for the Helpers: Caring for Yourself when Assisting Others for more information on the risks of helping and more specific suggestions in the practice of self-care.

Practicing Psychological First Aid

- **Teaching Tip:** At this point you will lead participants through the exercise on page 23 so they can practice their PFA skills. Depending on how many you have in the class, divide them into small groups of about 3 to 6 individuals. Give each group several scenarios to review and discuss. Each group should choose one person to take notes and to speak for the group. After about 15 minutes, ask each group to share their responses with the rest of the class. Set time limits for small and large group discussions.
**Practicing Psychological First Aid**

Groups of 3 - 5

**Scenario 1:** An earthquake has severely damaged an entire community. While distributing water to people picking through the remains of their homes, you hear a woman standing alone muttering, “It’s gone, it’s all gone. Everything I own is all gone.”

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>DMH ATTITUDE / ACTION</th>
<th>WHAT WOULD YOU SAY OR DO?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Model calm</td>
<td>Speak in a soft voice. “Hello my name is _____. How can I help?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide acknowledgement, warmth and honesty</td>
<td>“I can understand why you would be so upset. This must be so difficult. I am so sorry this has happened.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Show you are listening</td>
<td>Focus your attention directly on the person. Sit or stand next to or facing her. “I hear you saying everything you own is gone. Would you like to say more about what you have lost?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Help survivors to help themselves</td>
<td>“Where would you be able to sleep tonight?” “Perhaps later we can make a list of the things you lost or need.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attend to safety needs</td>
<td>“Please be careful as there might be aftershocks. Also we need to be sure you do not cut yourself on the broken or sharp objects.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attend to physical needs</td>
<td>“Please take some water.” “How will you stay warm and have a safe place to sleep tonight?” “What do you need right now”?</td>
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<td>Provide accurate information</td>
<td>“I can give you the address of a shelter that is open or the location of where there is food distribution.” Provide phone numbers and information about where to get clothing and other necessary resources.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provide psychoeducation</td>
<td>“What will you do when you leave here today? How will you take care of yourself?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Help to access social support</td>
<td>“Is there a trusted friend or family member we can call who can help you?”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Help to manage conflict</td>
<td>“The earth can sometimes shake and create disasters. This is not anyone’s fault.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>Make a referral for additional help</td>
<td>(Too soon to make a referral). If the person is not responsive or is not able to take care of herself, try to get more help for her.</td>
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<tr>
<td>End the conversation and take care of yourself</td>
<td>“Is there anything else I can help you with right now?”</td>
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## Practicing Psychological First Aid

**Groups of 3 - 5**

**Scenario 2:** Threats of violence have sent many families to shelters. You see a child crying and no adults nearby.

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### Scenario 3: The area has had ongoing conflict and new violence has many afraid for their safety. You see a young man who is hitting himself in the head.

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Practicing Psychological First Aid
Groups of 3 - 5

**Scenario 4:** It has been very hot in your area, causing many heat related deaths. You see an older woman on the sidewalk looking flushed and tired. She is angry and says: “Those people caused the heat wave.”

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**Scenario 5:** A building collapse has left several people injured. You are providing support for a parent who can not find his/her child and is worried about the child’s safety.

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Some Final Thoughts on Helping Others:

- Be kind.
- Be calm.
- Be informed.
- Be tolerant.
- Be patient.
- Be flexible.
- Ask for help when you need it.
- Take care of yourself.

Thank You

**Teaching Tip:** At this point you should ask if participants have any questions or comments about using PFA in their communities. Be aware that sometimes people will ask questions that have no clear answers, and sometimes they will want to discuss problems in their own families or neighborhoods. It is a good idea to be prepared with a list of resources in the community that could help people who need additional support.

Finally, to complete the workshop, ask participants to fill out the Community Program Evaluation.
Resource List

USAID SPONSORED PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL MATERIALS
(in Arabic, English, Hebrew, and Russian)
  Coping with Traumatic Experiences
  Caregivers and Parents
  Children’s Activity book
  Help for the Helpers
http://www.newpaltz.edu/idmh/usaid.html

Disaster Tip Sheets for U.S. Religious Leaders
http://www.n-din.org/ndin_resources/ndin_tips_sheets_v1208.php

Disaster Preparedness Tip Sheets for Seniors
http://www.aging.ca.gov/ProgramsProviders/AAA/Disaster_Preparedness/Disaster_Tip_Sheets/

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
http://www.samhsa.gov/

World Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine
http://www.wadem.org/

Center for International Disaster Information
http://www.cidi.org/

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network
http://www.nctsnet.org/

National Center for PTSD
http://www.ptsd.va.gov/

IASC Guideline on Mental Health and Psychosomatic Support in Emergency Settings

Psychological First Aid for Health workers developed by WHO

Local Resources:
It is important that all trainers be able to provide accurate information concerning local community resources. You can provide addresses, phone numbers and web addresses where community members can get additional practical, health related and emotional resources. Be sure to ask your supervisor or team leaders for suggestions.
Instructor Guidelines
The following information is provided to help you prepare to deliver this workshop in your community. This class was designed to take about 2 hours, including the exercise. If you need to finish it more quickly, it is best to include less detail in the first section on event characteristics and stress reactions so you have enough time to teach the PFA actions. Be sure to leave time for the exercise – it is important that people have a chance to practice what they have learned in order to remember it and to feel comfortable using the information in the future.

Where should you hold the workshop?
Think about groups or organizations in your community that can provide these things:

- A large enough space to comfortably hold a group, hopefully with a computer and projector so you can show the PowerPoint slides.
- Help with spreading the word to attract a group of participants.

Organizations like schools, community centers, and places of worship are ideal because they already have connections in the area, and people may be more likely to attend if the workshop is recommended by someone they already trust.

Who should attend the workshop?
Anyone! It is appropriate for males and females of any age from adolescence and older, and for any profession or level of education. If participants are not able to read well you may need to assist them with the information and the Community Program Evaluation, but that should not prevent them from learning these skills.

How big should the group be?
Class size is flexible, but 20 to 30 participants is ideal.

What if the computer technology is not available in my community?
It certainly is possible to teach the workshop without using the PowerPoint slides. You could give participants printed copies so they can follow along on paper. If that is not an option, you can print one copy for yourself and talk through the points so they hear all of the information.
What should I do if someone does not want to fill out the Community Program Evaluation?

Explain that we are asking them to complete it so we can see how helpful the class is for community members. Reassure them that it is completely anonymous, and their names will never be included. If they need assistance with reading or writing you can provide that. If someone still refuses, that is fine, just be sure to include the total number of people in the class when you submit the surveys to your supervisor.

What should I do if someone gets upset or asks a difficult question?

First, remain calm since, as we learn in PFA, that will help make the other person calm. You can ask someone who wants to talk about a personal situation to speak to you privately after class. At that point you can try to help them yourself if appropriate, or you can connect them with resources in the community. The important thing is to keep teaching the class – try to avoid letting one person dominate the discussion.

How to be an interesting teacher:

• Prepare carefully by reading this manual and planning what you will say about each slide.

• If you are showing the Powerpoint slides and your participants are able to read them, do not simply read the words on the slides – that is very boring for participants. Instead, elaborate on the written information, adding points from this manual that you think are appropriate for the audience.

• Pay attention to the audience while you teach. Are they listening actively? Do they seem to understand you? Is anyone getting upset because the information is reminding them of a difficult experience? If so you might give them permission to take a short break or get some water while you continue with the class. You may also need to simplify your language, move more quickly, or not give as much detail on certain topics.

• Practice! Teach the entire workshop to a group of friends, family, or coworkers so you know exactly how long each section will take, how people act during the exercise, etc.

• Be confident. Teaching new material makes everyone nervous, but remember that you are giving people valuable skills that will really benefit them.