

Annex 3
Psychological First Aid

Psychological first aid (PFA)¹

What is PFA ?

According to Sphere project² (2011) and IASC (2007)³, psychological first aid (PFA) describes a humane, supportive response to a fellow human being who is suffering and who may need support. PFA involves the following themes:

- √ providing practical care and support, which does not intrude;
- √ assessing needs and concerns;
- √ helping people to address basic needs (for example, food and water, information);
- √ listening to people, but not pressuring them to talk;
- √ comforting people and helping them to feel calm;
- √ helping people connect to information, services and social supports;
- √ protecting people from further harm.

What PFA is not ?

- X It is not something that only professionals can do.
- X It is not professional counselling.
- X It is not “psychological debriefing”⁴ in that PFA does not necessarily involve a detailed discussion of the event that caused the distress.
- X It is not asking someone to analyze what happened to them or to put time and events in order.
- X Although PFA involves being available to listen to people’s stories, it is not about pressuring people to tell you their feelings and reactions to an event.

Who is PFA for?

PFA is for distressed people who have been recently exposed to a serious crisis event. You can provide help to both children and adults. However, not everyone who experiences a crisis event will need or want PFA. Do not force help on people who do not want it, but make yourself easily available to those who may want support.

¹ Psychological first aid: Guide for field workers WHO 2011

² Sphere project :Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Humanitarian Response 2011

³ Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC)

⁴ WHO (2010) and Sphere (2011) describe psychological debriefing as promoting ventilation by asking a person to briefly but systematically recount their perceptions, thoughts and emotional reactions during a recent stressful event. This intervention is not recommended. This is distinct from routine operational debriefing of aid workers used by some organizations at the end of a mission or work task.

When is PFA provided?

PFA is aimed at helping people who have been very recently affected by a crisis event. You can provide PFA when you first have contact with very distressed people. This is usually during or immediately after an event. However, it may sometimes be days or weeks after, depending on how long the event lasted and how severe it was.

General guidelines

Respect people's...

Safety

- Avoid putting people at further risk of harm as a result of your actions.
- Make sure, to the best of your ability, that the adults and children you help are safe and protect them from physical or psychological harm.

Dignity

- Treat people with respect and according to their cultural and social norms.

Rights

- Make sure people can access help fairly and without discrimination.
- Help people to claim their rights and access available support.
- Act only in the best interest of any person you encounter.

<i>DO'S ✓</i>	<i>DON'TS X</i>
✓ Be honest and trustworthy.	X Don't exploit your relationship as a helper.
✓ Respect people's right to make their own decisions.	X Don't ask the person for any money or favor for helping them.
✓ Be aware of and set aside your own biases and prejudices.	X Don't make false promises or give false information.
✓ Make it clear to people that even if they refuse help now, they can still access help in the future.	X Don't exaggerate your skills.
✓ Respect privacy and keep the person's story confidential, if this is appropriate.	X Don't force help on people, and don't be intrusive or pushy.
✓ Behave appropriately by considering the person's culture, age and gender.	X Don't pressure people to tell you their story.
	X Don't share the person's story with others.
	X Don't judge the person for their actions or feelings.

Provide empathetic communication

Below are suggestions for things to say and do, and what **not** to say and do. Most importantly, be yourself, be genuine and be sincere in offering your help and care.

THINGS TO SAY AND DO ✓

- ✓ Try to find a quiet place to talk, and minimize outside distractions.
- ✓ Respect privacy and keep the person's story confidential, if this is appropriate.

- ✓ Stay near the person but keep an appropriate distance depending on their age, gender and culture.
- ✓ Let them know you are listening; for example, nod your head or say “hmmmm...”
- ✓ Be patient and calm.
- ✓ Provide factual information, **if** you have it. Be honest about what you know and don't know. “I don't know, but I will try to find out about that for you.”
- ✓ Give information in a way the person can understand – keep it simple.
- ✓ Acknowledge how they are feeling and any losses or important events they tell you about, such as loss of their home or death of a loved one. “I'm so sorry. I can imagine this is very sad for you.”
- ✓ Acknowledge the person's strengths and how they have helped themselves.
- ✓ Allow for silence.

THINGS NOT TO SAY AND DO **X**

- X** Don't pressure someone to tell their story.
- X** Don't interrupt or rush someone's story (for example, don't look at your watch or speak too rapidly).
- X** Don't touch the person if you're not sure it is appropriate to do so.
- X** Don't judge what they have or haven't done, or how they are feeling. Don't say: “You shouldn't feel that way,” or “You should feel lucky you survived.”
- X** Don't make up things you don't know.
- X** Don't use terms that are too technical.
- X** Don't tell them someone else's story.
- X** Don't talk about your own troubles.
- X** Don't give false promises or false reassurances.
- X** Don't think and act as if you must solve all the person's problems for them.
- X** Don't take away the person's strength and sense of being able to care for themselves.
- X** Don't talk about people in negative terms (for example, don't call them “crazy” or “mad”).