

PFA

PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID

**STRONGER
TOGETHER**



A GUIDE TO HELP YOU & YOUR COMMUNITY

PAHO

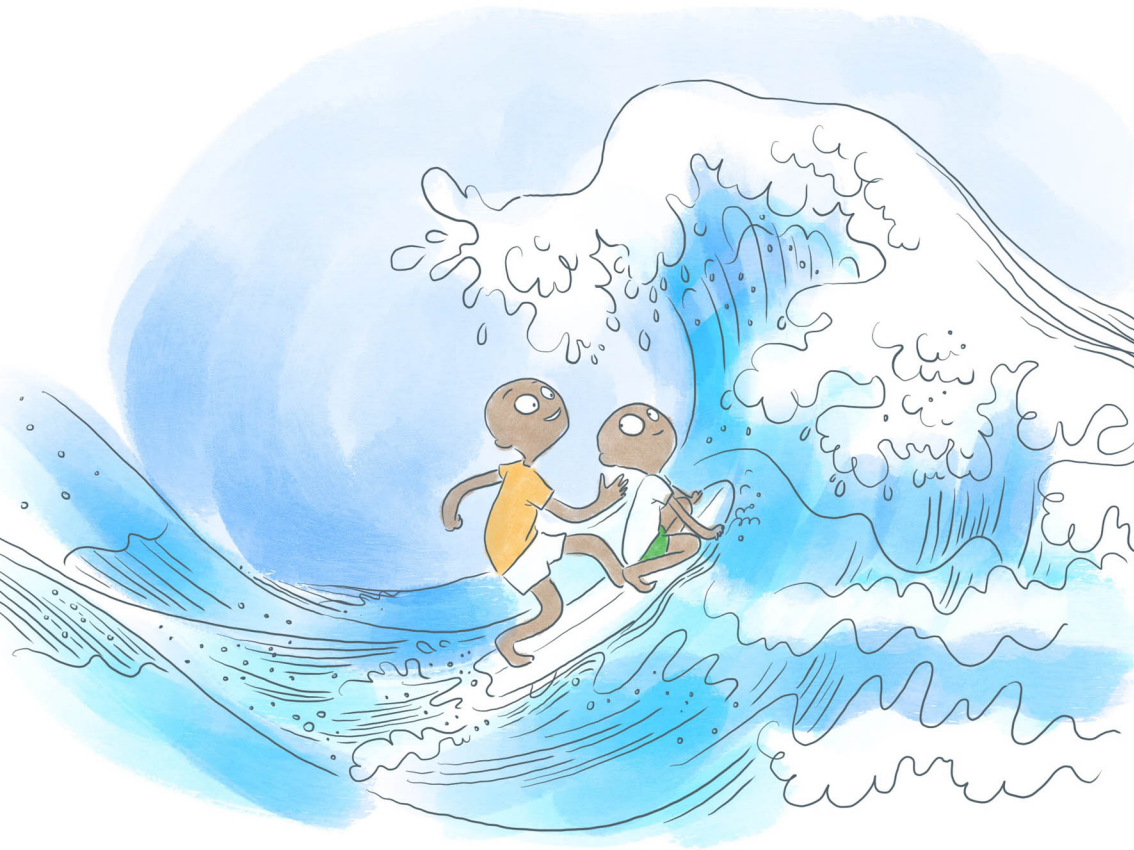


Pan American
Health
Organization



World Health
Organization
www.who.org/america





The Pan American Health Organization and the Caribbean Development Bank have developed this booklet as a tool to help you take care of yourself and your community during crisis situations. This is achieved through psychological first aid, also known as PFA, a humane, supportive and practical response to a fellow human being who is suffering and may need support.

In this booklet, our “PFA helper” will guide you through the three basic principles of PFA: look, listen and link. This will help you to approach affected people, listen and understand their needs, and link them with practical support and information. It will also bring to your attention the needs of specific groups, including men, women, children and adolescents, and people with disabilities, among others.

Enjoy the booklet, read it again from time to time, share it with friends, family and members of your community, and spread the message:

“Stronger Together”.

A DISASTER



* PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID *

PFA*
HUMAN
SUPPORTIVE
RESPONSE

NOT ONLY
PROS CAN
DO IT

YOU CAN ALSO SUPPORT
YOUR COMMUNITY

EVERYONE HAS
**STRENGTHS
& ABILITIES**
TO HELP OTHERS COPE
WITH THEIR LIFE CHALLENGES

BUT FIRST
YOU NEED TO
FEEL OK

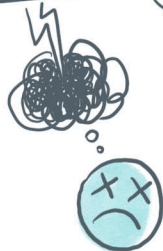
People who
are suffering
may need
support.



PEOPLE

MAY HAVE DIFFERENT
DISTRESS REACTIONS

CAN BE
VERY HELPFUL




LONG TERM
RECOVERY



DO NOT
FORCE
HELP

MAKE
YOURSELF
EASILY
AVAILABLE

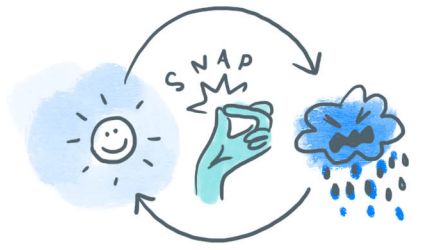
This guide will help you to know the most supportive things to say and do for distressed people.



LOOK

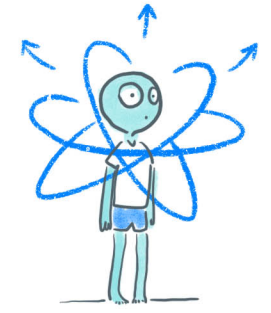
LOOK

YOUR SAFETY FIRST!



Crisis situations change rapidly :

- Weather conditions
- Flooding
- Building that may collapse...



Take time to “look” around you before offering help.

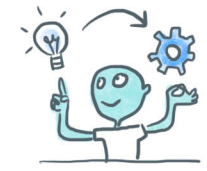
PFA should be provided by adults.



be calm



be safe

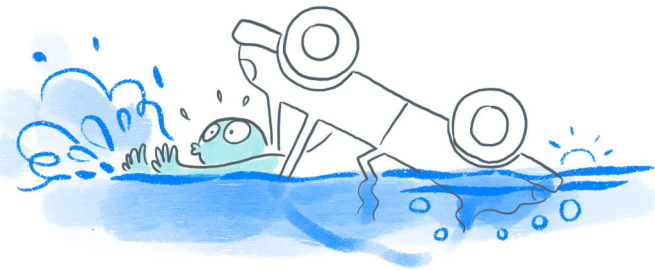


think before you act

OBVIOUS URGENT BASIC NEEDS



LIFE THREATENING CONDITIONS?

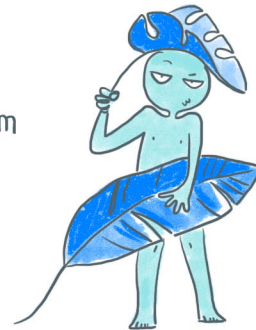


BASIC NEEDS?

Shelter, food, water?



Protection from the weather, clothing?



Need rescuing, such as people trapped or in immediate danger?

Critically injured and in need of emergency, medical help?



IF YOU CANNOT ACT, LOOK FOR HELP OR TRAINED PEOPLE



People may react in various ways to a crisis **immediately** and **in the following days**.



Severely distressed people should not be left alone!

Try to keep them safe until the reaction passes or until you can find help.

SERIOUS DISTRESS REACTIONS

LOOK FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE LIKELY TO NEED SPECIAL ATTENTION

- children & adolescents
- people with health conditions or physical and mental disabilities

DISORIENTATION

Not knowing their own name, what happened...

CONFUSED

Emotionally numb or feeling unreal

Anger, anxiety & fear

IRRITABILITY



ON GUARD JUMPY



PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

Shaking, headaches, feeling very tired, loss of appetite...

NOT RESPONDING NOT SPEAKING AT ALL

GUILT, SHAME FOR HAVING SURVIVED OR FOR NOT SAVING OTHERS

CRYING, SADNESS, DEPRESSED MOOD, GRIEF



INSOMNIA, NIGHTMARES

WORRYING THAT SOMETHING REALLY BAD IS GOING TO HAPPEN



LISTEN

LISTEN

HOW TO LISTEN PROPERLY?

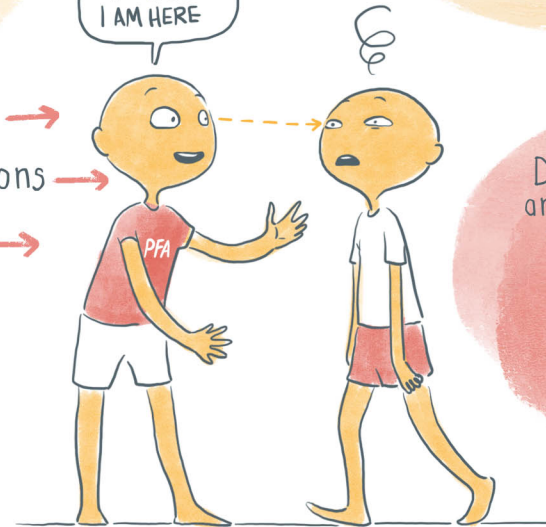
Be aware of words and body language

LET THEM KNOW YOU ARE HERE

Some people may not want to speak about what has happened. However, they may value it if you stay with them quietly, or offer practical support like a meal or a glass of water

IF YOU NEED TO TALK I AM HERE

Eye contact →
Facial expressions →
Gestures →



Do not pressure anyone to tell you what they have been through

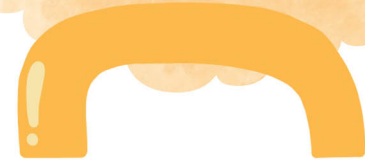


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1 APPROACH RESPECTFULLY



Help the person feel comfortable
Find a safe and quiet place to talk.
Offer water if you can.



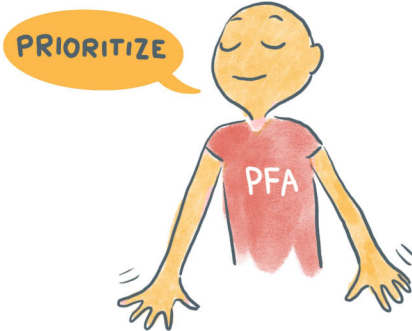
RESPECT PRIVACY & DIGNITY



- IF APPROPRIATE, KEEP THE PERSON'S STORY CONFIDENTIAL
- TRY TO PROTECT THE PERSON FROM EXPOSURE TO THE MEDIA

2 ASK

FIND OUT WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO THEM AT THIS MOMENT...



... AND HELP THEM WORK OUT WHAT THEIR PRIORITIES ARE



3 LISTEN

AND HELP THEM TO FEEL CALM



Be patient and calm

Stay close but keep an appropriate distance

Listen if they want to talk about what happened

Let them know that you are listening
nod your head or say "hmmm..."

4 PROVIDE

FACTUAL INFORMATION, IF YOU HAVE IT

Be honest about what you know and don't

I'LL TRY TO FIND OUT

Acknowledge strength

YOU HAVE BEEN STRONG

Acknowledge feelings & loss

I'M SO SORRY. I CAN IMAGINE THIS IS VERY SAD FOR YOU



Allow for silence to give the person time to share

Some people may feel "out of it" or disconnected.

For example, they may stay isolated or not answer. They may look "lost", not know what happened or feel they don't know where they are...



You can help them by following these tips!

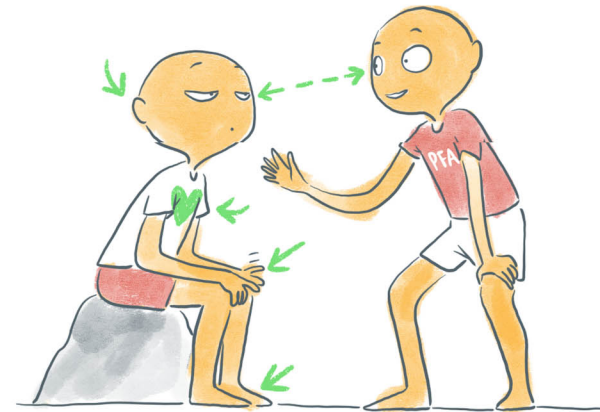
DO

KEEP A
CALM &
SOFT VOICE

HAVE KIND
EYE CONTACT

REMINDE THEM
THAT YOU
ARE HERE
TO HELP

REMINDE THEM
THAT THEY
ARE SAFE, IF
IT'S TRUE



FOCUS ON YOUR
BREATHING,
BREATH SLOWLY

TAP YOUR FINGERS
ON YOUR LAP

PLACE AND FEEL
YOUR FEET ON
THE FLOOR

LOOK FOR
NON-DISTRESSING
THINGS AROUND YOU...

WHAT DO YOU
SEE HERE? CAN YOU
DESCRIBE IT?

DON'T

Don't interrupt or rush someone's story (don't look at your watch or speak rapidly...)

TELL ME!!!

Don't make up things you don't know

I PROMISE YOU...

I'LL DO IT FOR YOU



Don't talk about your own troubles

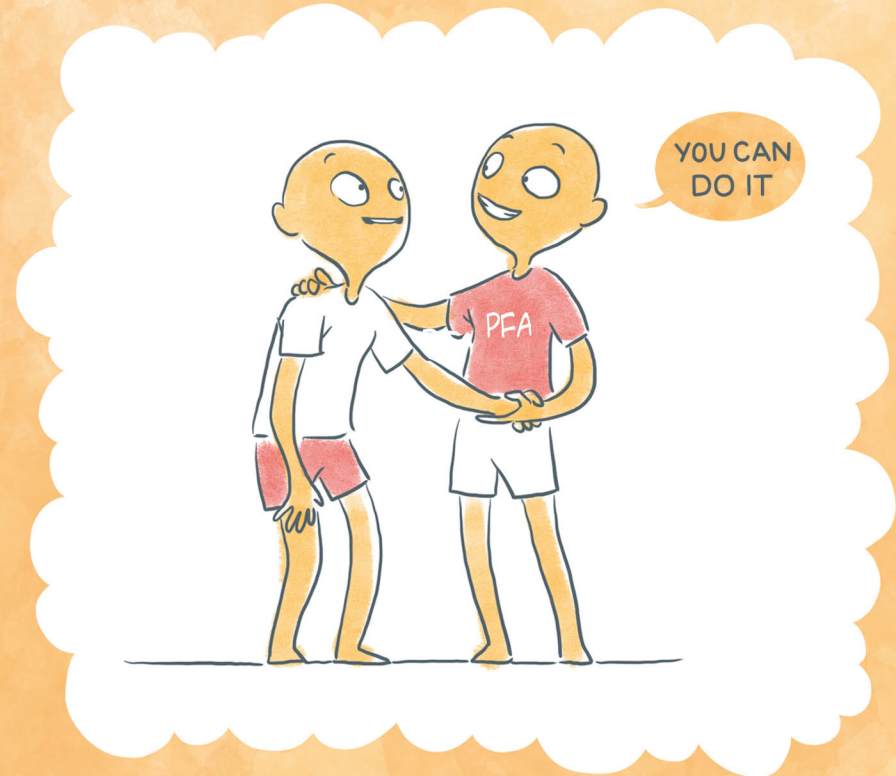
YOU SHOULDN'T FEEL THAT WAY

YOU'RE LUCKY YOU SURVIVED

Don't tell them someone else's story

DON'T THINK & ACT AS IF YOU MUST SOLVE ALL THEIR PROBLEMS!

They have to feel their strength and capacity to care for themselves



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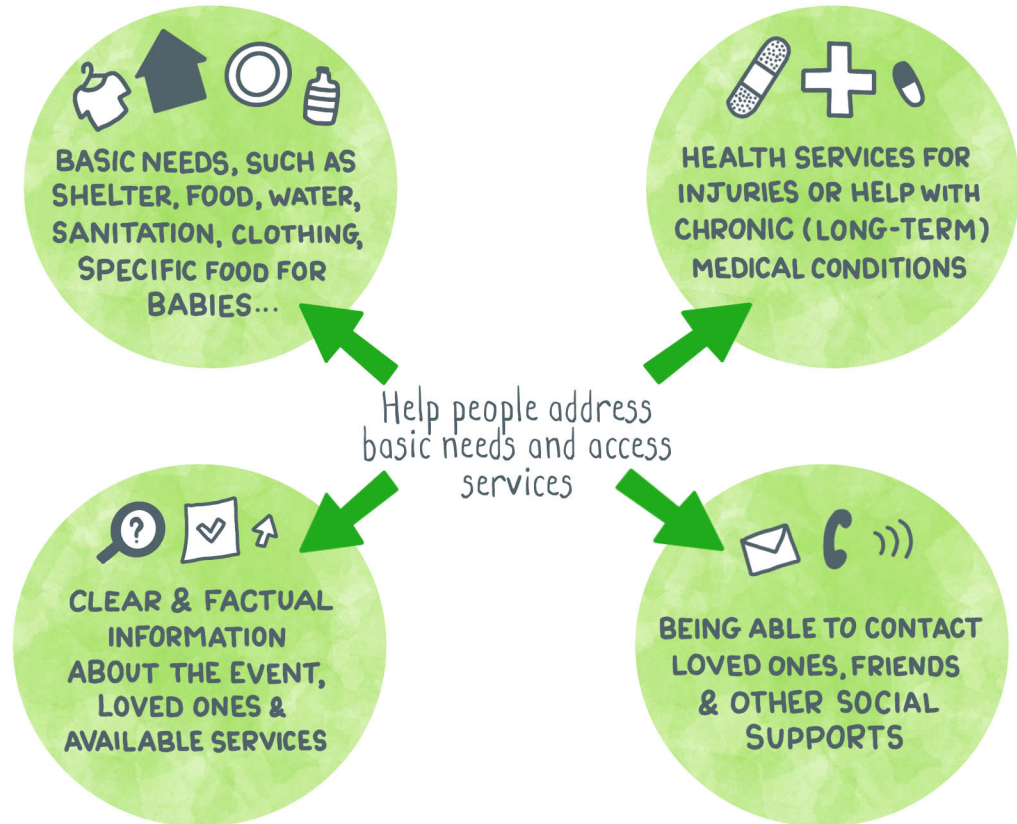


LINK



LINK

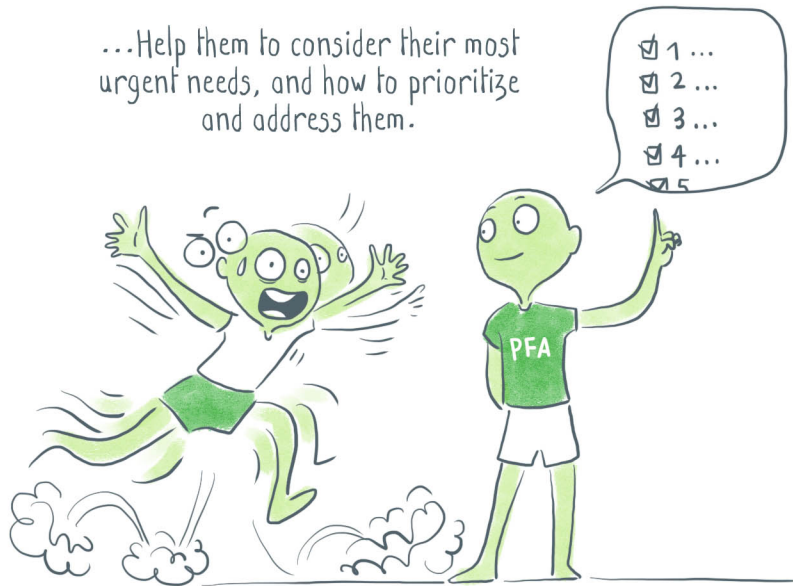
HELP PEOPLE TO HELP THEMSELVES TO REGAIN CONTROL OF THEIR SITUATION



Follow up with people if you promise to do so

A PERSON IN DISTRESS CAN FEEL OVERWHELMED...

...Help them to consider their most urgent needs, and how to prioritize and address them.



Being able to manage a few issues will give the person a greater sense of control in the situation and strengthen their own ability to cope!

ENCOURAGE POSITIVE STRATEGIES



DISCOURAGE NEGATIVE STRATEGIES



GIVE INFORMATION

- ✓ Only say what you know
- ✓ Do not make up information or give false reassurances
- ✓ Keep messages simple and accurate
- ✓ Repeat the message to be sure people hear and understand it

Rumours will be common!

Find out where to get correct information & when and where to get updates

WHAT TO DO?

CONNECT PEOPLE WITH LOVED ONES & SOCIAL SUPPORT

PEOPLE WHO FEEL THEY HAD GOOD SOCIAL SUPPORT AFTER A CRISIS COPE BETTER THAN THOSE WHO FEEL THEY WERE NOT WELL SUPPORTED



KEEP UPDATED ABOUT:

- ✓ STATE OF THE CRISIS
- ✓ SAFETY ISSUES
- ✓ AVAILABLE SERVICES
- ✓ CONDITION OF MISSING PEOPLE

INFORM PEOPLE ABOUT AVAILABLE SERVICES & HELP THEM ACCESS:

- ✓ HEALTH SERVICES
- ✓ FAMILY TRACING
- ✓ SHELTER
- ✓ FOOD DISTRIBUTION



Make sure vulnerable people also know about existing services



HELP KEEP FAMILIES TOGETHER & CHILDREN WITH THEIR PARENTS AND LOVED ONES



HELP PEOPLE TO CONTACT FRIENDS & RELATIVES TO GET SUPPORT



IF RELIGIOUS PRACTICE IS HELPFUL FOR A PERSON, TRY TO CONNECT THEM WITH THEIR SPIRITUAL COMMUNITY



HELP BRING AFFECTED PEOPLE TOGETHER TO SUPPORT EACH OTHER
FOR EXAMPLE, ASK PEOPLE TO CARE FOR THE ELDERLY



**SPECIAL
NEEDS**

SPECIAL CARE FOR MEN & WOMEN

SEEKING HELP IS NOT A WEAKNESS

STRENGTH DOES NOT MEAN CARRYING THE BURDEN ON YOUR OWN

BEING STRONG MEANS TAKING CARE FOR YOURSELF & CARING FOR & ACCEPTING HELP FROM OTHERS

IT IS ALRIGHT TO SHOW EMOTIONS



IT IS IMPORTANT TO CARE OF YOURSELF, SO YOU CAN TAKE CARE OF OTHERS



VIOLENCE IS NEVER TO BE ACCEPTED, EVEN IN A DISASTER

CHILDREN & ADOLESCENTS

ARE PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE IN A CRISIS.
IT DISRUPTS THEIR FAMILIAR WORLD &
ROUTINES THAT MAKE THEM FEEL SECURE.

CHILDREN COPE BETTER WHEN THEY HAVE
A STABLE & CALM ADULT AROUND THEM.

WHEN CHILDREN ARE WITH THEIR
CAREGIVERS, TRY TO SUPPORT
THE CAREGIVER.

⚡ SPECIFIC DISTRESS REACTIONS

(IN ADDITION TO THE PREVIOUS ONES)

✓ THINGS CAREGIVERS CAN DO TO HELP CHILDREN

FOR ALL AGES, GIVE THEM
EXTRA TIME & ATTENTION.

IF POSSIBLE, KEEP TO
REGULAR ROUTINES & SCHEDULES
(FOR FOOD, BEDTIME...).

INFANTS



- Return to earlier behaviors (ex: bedwetting or thumb-sucking)
- Cling to caregivers
- Reduce their play or use repetitive play related to the distressing event

- Keep them warm and safe
- Keep them away from loud noises and chaos
- Speak in a calm and soft voice
- Give cuddles and hugs

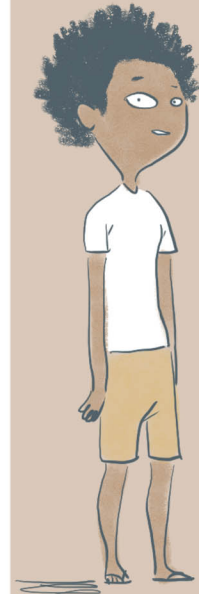
SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN



- Believe they caused bad things to happen
- Develop new fears
- Become less affectionate
- Feel alone
- Become preoccupied with protecting or rescuing people

- Remind them often that they are safe
- Explain that they are not to blame for bad things that happened
- Give simple answers about what happened without scary details
- Allow them to stay close to you if they are fearful
- Be patient with children who start demonstrating behaviours they did when they were younger
- Provide a chance to play and relax

ADOLESCENTS

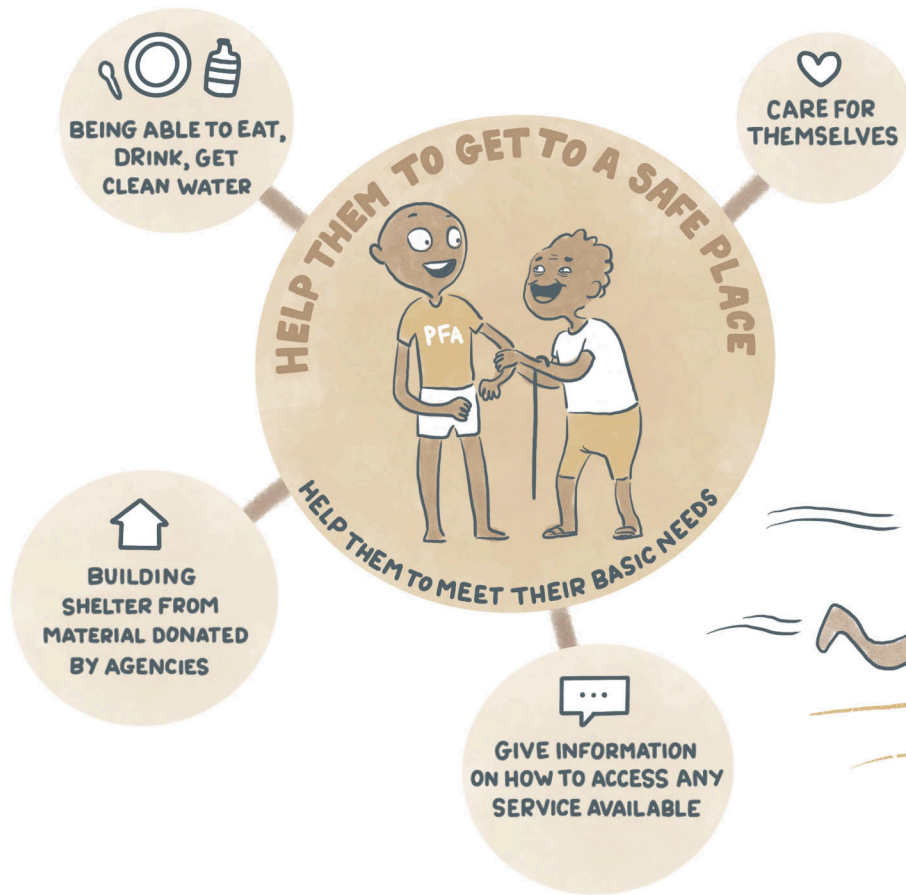


- Feel "nothing"
- Feel different from or isolated from their friends,
- display risk-taking behavior & negative attitudes

- Provide facts about what happened and explain what is going on now
- Allow them to be sad
- Don't expect them to be tough
- Listen to their thoughts & fears without being judgmental
- Set clear rules & expectations
- Ask them about the dangers they face, and discuss how they can be best avoided
- Encourage them to be helpful

VULNERABLE PEOPLE

PEOPLE WITH HEALTH CONDITIONS, PHYSICAL OR MENTAL DISABILITIES & SOME ELDERLY PEOPLE MAY NEED SPECIAL HELP



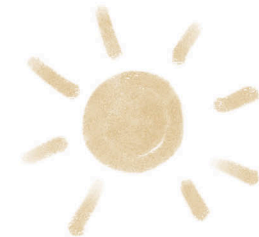
ASK PEOPLE IF THEY HAVE ANY HEALTH CONDITIONS OR IF THEY REGULARLY TAKE MEDICATION

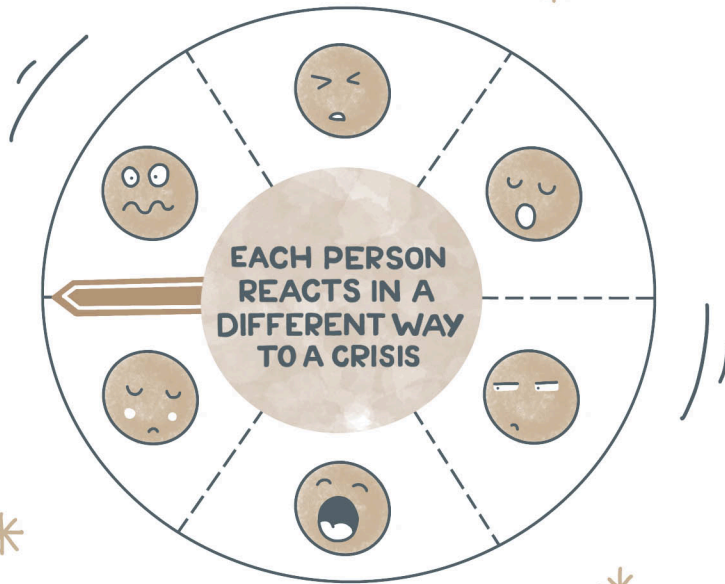
HELP PEOPLE GET THEIR MEDICATION OR ACCESS MEDICAL SERVICES



Stay with the person or try to make sure they have someone to help them if you need to leave

Consider linking the person with a protection agency or other relevant support, to help them in the longer term





It is normal to feel sad, upset
or to experience strong emotions

**HOWEVER, MOST PEOPLE WILL
FEEL BETTER OVER TIME**



But, if **1 month**
after the event,
you, or people around you,
still experience distressful
reactions, like nightmares,
flashbacks, or intense sadness,
it is time to seek professional help.

**THEY CAN HELP
IN A STRICTLY
CONFIDENTIAL
MANNER**

Talk with a health care professional with
mental health training, if available.

TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

As a helper, you may feel responsible for people's safety & care

Remember that you are not responsible for solving everyone's problems

Help people help themselves!

Even during the crisis, take time for yourself.
Manage stress by having healthy habits:

- Keep reasonable working hours to avoid exhaustion.
- Divide the workload among helpers, working in shifts during the initial recovery phase.
- Take regular rest breaks.

You may witness or experience terrible things (destruction, injury, death or violence) and hear stories of other people's pain and suffering.

All of these experiences can affect you.

Think about what helped you to cope with stress in the past.

Check how fellow helpers are doing. Find ways to support each other.

Talk about your experience of helping in the crisis situation with friends, loved ones or other people you trust for support.

Acknowledge what you were able to do to help, even in small ways. Accept the limits of what you could do in the circumstances.



Psychological First Aid. Stronger Together. A guide to help you and your community
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