A Guide to Basic Psychological First Aid

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Terror attacks can expose people and community to uncertainty and stress. Emotional distress might arise during or immediately after an attack, even if you are not a direct victim of the attack. In the days that follow, some people may feel confused, distressed, fearful and numb. Do you know that basic psychological first aid can be easily administered to help our family, friends and colleagues who are affected in the aftermath of an attack?

What is Psychological First Aid (PFA)?

It is a humane, supportive and practical first response given to people or persons in emotional distress during or immediately after a crisis.

You can help by picking up some basic psychological first aid skills.

- Calming and comforting affected persons
- Understanding their needs and concerns, and respond accordingly
- Helping people access information and services
- Protecting affected persons from any further harm
- Providing practical support

The following points can guide you in administering PFA when necessary.

Psychological First Aid — A.S.A.P.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Description</th>
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| Active Listening | • Attentive
• Eye contact
• Paraphrase, summarise, clarify
• Respect privacy and ensure confidentiality
• Show your interest, attention and care |
| Stay Close | • Being available and present
• Build rapport and trust
• Show empathy and connect
• Appropriate physical contact
• Personal space |
| Provide Practical Help | • Connect them to loved ones, community
• Refer them to professional help
• Facilitate access to basic needs
• Be honest about what you know and don’t know
• Provide factual information if you have it
• Give information in a way that the person may understand
• Respect their right to make their own decisions |
| Accept Feelings | • Keep an open mind
• Accept stories
• Accept rejection of help, if person needs space
• Accept expressed emotions/silence |
| Common Signs of Stress include: | Source: MHA |

- Physical: Falling sick easily, Cold sweat, Dry mouth, Headaches, Backaches, Breathing difficulties, Sleep disturbances, Rapid heartbeat, Dizziness
- Emotional: Fear felt during and after the attack, Anger at what has happened, and whoever has allowed it to happen, Sadness for injuries, death and loss that occurred, Shame for being helpless, or for not having reacted as one should have, Guilt for surviving, or because you did not do enough, Sense of loss
- Mental: Overly alert, Forgetfulness, Poor concentration, Loss of sense of reality, Flashbacks of incident, Easily irritated, Inability to feel positive, Recurring thoughts of trauma, Sense of loss


Source: Singapore Red Cross Academy

Active listening is a key part of psychological first aid. It involves paying close attention to the person's words and body language, and reflecting their feelings back to them. This can help them feel heard and understood, and can reduce their stress and anxiety. It also helps to validate their emotions and experiences, which can be very therapeutic.

Stay Close is another important component of psychological first aid. It involves being physically present and available to the person, and building trust and rapport. This can help them feel supported and safe, and can reduce their fear and anxiety.

Provide Practical Help is about connecting the person to their loved ones, or helping them access professional help if needed. It also involves facilitating access to basic needs, and being honest about what you know and don't know.

Accept Feelings is about acknowledging the person's emotions and experiences, and respecting their right to make their own decisions. This can help them feel validated and heard, and can reduce their stress and anxiety.

Common Signs of Stress include physical, emotional, and mental symptoms. These can vary in severity and duration, and can be influenced by a variety of factors. It is important to be aware of these signs and to offer help and support when needed.