
STEPS IN PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID

In the situation where a person needs support immediately after a critical event, follow these guidelines:

- Establish contact by introducing yourself and your assistance
- If at all possible, remove the person from the stressful situation, limit their exposure to sights, sounds and smells, protect them from bystanders and the media, provide adequate food and fluids but avoid alcohol
- Make sure that someone stays with the person at all times
- Ask what happened, how they are doing and let them talk about their experiences, concerns and feelings, without forcing anyone to talk if they are not ready to do so
- Reassure the affected that their reactions are normal
- Assist in decision-making if necessary
- Ask the affected if they have a place to go, if not help them find shelter, if they have someone to look after them or someone to talk to after getting home. If not assist in establishing contact to significant others
- Provide factual information about where and how to seek specific assistance

FOR MORE INFORMATION, CONTACT US:

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 **Reference Centre for
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Illustrations: Rod Shaw/International Federation


Emergency Response Unit

 **Reference Centre for
Psychosocial Support**

PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID



 International Federation
of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies

PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID

Psychological first aid is a useful way for humanitarian staff and volunteers to help persons who are in shock or crisis. In this state, people may be visibly distressed, affected by violent emotions, be apathetic or have lost hope. This brochure tells about the basic principles of psychological first aid and describes essential steps to follow.

Psychological first aid is about providing basic, human support; delivering practical information and showing empathy, concern, respect and confidence in the abilities of the individual. The affected persons should be met with compassion, listened to and protected from the surroundings. They might need help with practical needs and problems while gradually becoming stronger and better able to care for themselves.



FOUR BASIC ELEMENTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID

STAY CLOSE

People in crisis may temporarily lose their basic sense of security and trust in the surroundings. Humanitarian workers can help to rebuild trust and security by staying physically close and by displaying a sense of care and empathy. Be prepared to encounter violent outbursts of feelings, the affected person might even shout or reject help. Do not become alarmed by anxiety or extreme show of emotions.



Jonas panicked after a dramatic traffic accident. His hands were shaking. The Red Cross volunteer took Jonas' hands and held them, while looking into his eyes. Jonas will never forget that look: "it was as if the volunteer understood me without saying a word".

LISTEN ACTIVELY

It is important to take the time to listen carefully in order to help someone going through a difficult time. Listen actively by asking clarifying questions, yet without probing. There may not be much time, but it is still important to give the person basic support until assistance arrives.



ACCEPT FEELINGS

People in crisis may display very different emotions, from joy of having survived to shame of having escaped injury. Accept the affected persons' interpretation of the events and acknowledge their feelings. Do not insist on correcting factual information or perceptions of the sequence of events.

PROVIDE GENERAL CARE AND PRACTICAL HELP

When a person is in a crisis situation, practical assistance can be a great help. Contact someone who can be with the affected person, arrange for help with children or accompany the person home or to receive further medical care. Follow the wishes of the affected person but avoid taking over more responsibility for the situation than the person actually needs.