Psychological First Aid: Increasing Resiliency of Healthcare Workers During COVID-19

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Trauma Recovery Innovations

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

> Adapted from:
  – World Health Organization *Psychological First Aid: Guide for Field Workers* and *Psychological First Aid Adapted for the Ebola Outbreak*
  – Materials developed by Dr. Debra Kaysen, Stanford University

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  – Trish Kritek and Anne Browning

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TRAINING OBJECTIVES: WHY, WHAT, WHEN, WHO, & HOW OF PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID (PFA)

> WHY: The need for resilience training following a pandemic
> WHAT: The foundations of PFA, what it is and is not
> WHEN: The timing of PFA delivery
> WHO: Identifying those who are most likely to benefit from PFA
> HOW: Delivery of PFA, strategies and tips
PFA: THE WHY
Resilience is the process of adapting well in the face of adversity or significant sources of stress.

- Resilience is ordinary & common, not extraordinary.
- Being resilient does not mean the absence of difficulty or distress.
- Resilience is not a trait -- it can be learned and acquired.

RESILIENCE ISN’T ONE SIZE FITS ALL
## SITUATIONAL RISK FACTORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Risk Factor</th>
<th>Pandemic Examples Of High-Risk Health Care Workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Severity of Event     | Those working directly on COVID units, the ER, or ICU  
Those who have observed patients die  
Those with possible exposure themselves  
Those who develop active infections |
| Life Stress           | Those with loved ones who are ill or vulnerable  
Those with numerous competing demands (childcare, financial concerns) |
| Social Support        | Those with limited contact with supportive loved ones  
Those with partners who are limited in their ability to provide support due to their own life demands  
Those with loved ones who are negatively judging response to pandemic |
## PRE-EXISTING RISK FACTORS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Risk Factor</th>
<th>Pandemic Examples Of High-Risk Health Care Workers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Previous Experiences</td>
<td>Those who have past trauma exposure, especially those who continue to struggle from that exposure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health problems</td>
<td>Those with prior or ongoing mental health problems (example: depression, anxiety, PTSD, substance use problems)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maladaptive coping strategies</td>
<td>Those with prior or ongoing maladaptive coping strategies (example: using alcohol or other substances to cope)</td>
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</table>
HOW MIGHT COVID-19 AFFECT HEALTHCARE WORKERS?

Front Line Workers

• High workload and increased stress

• Possible loss of coworkers

• Anxiety about their coworkers, patients, and families

• Distress about decisions about prioritizing & allocating care
WHAT HAPPENS DURING THE ACUTE AND CHRONIC STRESS PHASES MATTERS FOR WHO RECOVERS
PFA: THE WHAT
Psychological First Aid (PFA) is a humane, supportive response to someone suffering.

- **Acute intervention** to reduce initial distress caused by traumatic events
- Evidence informed
- Increase sense of safety, connection, calmness, and hope
- Increase access to social, physical and emotional support
- Increase self-efficacy

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PFA differs from traditional treatment

- PFA is not therapy
- It will not look like your standard therapy setting or structure
- It will not be the time or place to offer interpretations, do exposure, or dig into past learning experiences
- It is NOT psychological debriefing
## General PFA guidelines

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rule</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operate within a framework of an organized response system (part of a team)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintain confidentiality</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Respect their right to make their own well-informed decisions</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Be culturally sensitive and aware</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Remain within scope of your expertise, role, and training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice self-care and be aware of your own physical and emotional reactions</td>
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</table>
PFA CORE THEMES: Provide practical care and support, which does not intrude

- Communicate calm, compassion, and respect
- Listen to people who want to share
- Give accurate information
- Help people cope in healthy ways
- Connect people with services & social supports
- Teach short-term ways to manage strong emotions
PFA: THE WHEN
PFA can be delivered during a mass disaster and in the immediate aftermath.

PFA can serve as a framework for the peer-to-peer program calls during and after the current COVID-19 crisis.
PFA: THE WHO
PFA DOES NOT REQUIRE A MENTAL HEALTH SPECIALIST FOR DELIVERY AND CAN BE HELPFUL TO A RANGE OF INDIVIDUALS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Providers</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do not</strong> need to have a mental health background</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do</strong> need to be trained in PFA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do</strong> need to have met their own needs first</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recipients</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do</strong> need to express interest in support and/or stabilization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Are</strong> often those at higher risk for developing negative outcomes due to proximity to crisis and/or other risk factors</td>
</tr>
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There may be situations when someone needs more advanced mental health support.

Know your limits

Know when and where to refer
PFA: THE HOW
PFA is comprised of 8 core actions that are:

- Not necessarily sequential
- Flexible
- Based on the person’s specific needs and concerns

Kaysen, 2020
PFA has 8 core actions:

1. Contact and engagement
2. Safety and comfort
3. Stabilization
4. Information gathering
5. Practical assistance
6. Links to Social Supports
7. Information on coping
8. Links to services

Kaysen, 2020
**PFA CORE ACTIONS:**

1. CONTACT & ENGAGEMENT
2. SUPPORT SAFETY AND COMFORT

**GOALS:**

- Build rapport
- Support and enhance emotional and physical safety
- COVID-19 context
  - Concerns about safety and wellbeing of self, loved ones, patients, & coworkers
PFA: Good Communication in Crisis

Be calm and show understanding to help individuals in distress feel more safe and secure, understood, respected and cared for appropriately.

Focus on what they want to tell you and how you can be of help.

Allow some silence to give the person space and encourage them to share with you if they wish.

Use simple, concrete terms without jargon.

Acknowledge what they have done already to take care of themselves and others.
**PRO-TIP: RESPONDING TO STRONG EMOTIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Validate emotions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Remind them</strong> there is no single or correct way to feel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Acknowledge</strong> they will probably continue to feel a range of up and down emotions for a while</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Expect</strong> widely varying reactions to a crisis and do not judge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Help support parents and caregivers</strong> about how to talk to their children about the crisis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Kaysen, 2020
PRO-TIP: RESPONDING TO STRONG EMOTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Sit with emotions</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provide a safe place for individual to experience emotions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let them tell you what they feel and need</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remain calm, control your own emotions, and don’t rush things</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remember: You can’t take away their pain and you don’t need to</td>
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Adapted from Kaysen, 2020
**PRO-TIP: RESPONDING TO ACUTE GRIEF DURING COVID-19**

Typical grief processes, rituals, and supports are interrupted

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acknowledge potential departures from</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Cultural, religious, and/or spiritual rituals</td>
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<tr>
<td>• One’s own or loved one’s wishes</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Help them identify</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Achievable rituals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Ways to engage virtual supports and comfort</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Kaysen, 2020
Goal: To calm and orient emotionally overwhelmed/disoriented survivors

- Not all individuals will need stabilization
- Pay attention to individuals whose reactions are so intense and persistent that it is impacting their ability to function
PRO-TIP FOR STABILIZATION: WHEN TO USE GROUNDING

Is the person unresponsive, panicked, or frantic? Are they stuck in their anxiety?

NO

Is the intense reaction interfering with essential duties, threatening safety, or preventing healthy coping?

NO

GROUNDS MAY NOT BE APPROPRIATE

YES

GROUNDS IS LIKELY APPROPRIATE

YES

Is this likely a one-time reaction in a crisis situation?
PRO-TIP FOR STABILIZATION: HOW TO USE GROUNDING

1. Sit comfortably and breathe slowly and deeply. Name 5 non-distressing things you can see.
2. Pause and breathe. Name 5 non-distressing sounds you can hear.
3. Pause and breathe. Name 5 non-distressing things you can feel.
Goals:
1) Identify immediate needs & concerns, gather information, & prioritize
2) Clarify needs & develop action plan

PRO-TIPS
• PFA is not one-size fits all
• Use active listening skills
• Prioritization should be collaborative
• Know what resources are available and/or know how to find out
PRO-TIP: PROBLEM SOLVING FOR MAKING A PLAN

1. Collaboratively **assess** and **prioritize** needs and concerns.
2. Choose the **most pressing** **controllable issue** to address.
3. Brainstorm possible **solutions** to the problem.
4. Consider **pros and cons** and **choose a solution**.
5. Make an **action plan** for carrying out the solution.
**PFA CORE ACTION:**
6. Connection with Social Supports

**Goal:**
Links to Social Supports

- Help establish brief or ongoing contacts with primary support persons and other sources of support
  - *family*
  - *friends*
  - *community*
PRO-TIP: SOCIAL SUPPORT HAS MANY FORMS

- Support for needs
- Emotional support
- Social connection
- Feeling needed
- Reassurance of self-worth
- Reliable support
- Advice and information
- Physical assistance
- Material assistance

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**PFA CORE ACTION**

7. Coping

**Goals:**

Provide information about

- stress reactions
- practical ways to cope, reduce stress, and promote adaptive functioning

**REMEMBER:** Any information you provide and skills you introduce or teach will be tailored to the individual’s concerns and priorities
PRO-TIP: Common Stress Reactions

Intrusive Reactions
- Ways the event comes back to mind

Avoidance
- Attempts to remove themselves from or protect themselves from

Physical Arousal & Reactions
- The body reacts as if danger is still present
- Rapid heartbeat, hyperventilation, headaches, dizziness, muscle aches,

Grief
- Response to death of loved ones

Depressive Symptoms
- Sleep problems, fatigue, worthlessness/guilt, suicidality
PRO-TIP: Normalize & Develop a Plan for Common Stress Reactions

• These reactions are **natural, expected, and common**
• Develop a plan to manage reminders of traumatic events, losses, & life changes

It may be time to get more help if they:
- continue more than 2 months
- worsen and impair functioning

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PRO-TIP: Identify existing coping strategies and potential new coping strategies

- Talking to others
- Positive distracting activities
- Resting and eating healthy meals
- Keeping a normal schedule
- Taking regular breaks
- Using humor
- Scheduling pleasant activities
- Focusing on something practical you can do right now
- Using relaxation methods
- Engaging in support groups/counseling
- Exercising
- Journaling

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**PRO-TIP: Addressing Sleep**

- **Establish**: a regular sleep schedule and limit daytime naps
- **Reduce**: alcohol
- **Eliminate**: afternoon/evening caffeine
- **Increase**: regular exercise
- **Cultivate**: relaxation before bedtime by doing something calming
PRO-TIP: Addressing Problematic Substance Use

- Discuss
  - their goals for use
  - difficulties in changing use

- Ask them about the positives and negatives of using substances to cope
  - Together, identify alternatives for use

- Refer for treatment
  - if appropriate and desired by them

Kaysen, 2020
PRO-TIP: Addressing Unhelpful Thoughts

Gentle, curious questions can help address unhelpful thoughts and the strong emotions linked to them:
• What would your kindest self say about this?
• What are other ways to look at this situation?
PFA CORE ACTION
8. Link with other services

Key Actions:

Connect
- to additional resources or services to address current needs as needed

Know
- what is available
- how to connect them to services (or who to ask)

Collaborate
- to identify what they need

Offer
- a summary of what was discussed and action items
- to follow up and check-in

Adapted from Kaysen, 2020
PFA is a Framework for Building Resilience: Apply as Self-Care
General Resources & References

**Detailed PFA training**

**PFA skills training manual**

**The PFA Mobile App**
https://mobile.va.gov/app/pfa-mobile

**PTSD Coach**
https://www.ptsd.va.gov/apps/ptsdcoachonline/default.html
https://mobile.va.gov/app/ptsd-coach

**UW Specific Resources**

**COVID Support Program**
https://psychiatry.uw.edu/clinical-care-consultation/covid-19-resources-for-mental-well-being/

**Psychiatry Dept Website**
https://psychiatry.uw.edu/clinical-care-consultation/covid-19-resources-for-mental-well-being/
PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID
FOR THOSE AFFECTED BY THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

It's normal for people affected by a pandemic to have a wide range of reactions, but not all will develop long-term problems.

People supporting those affected by a pandemic can play a key role in promoting their resilience and emotional healing.

COMMUNICATE CALM, COMPASSION, AND RESPECT through what you do, what you say, and how you say it. Don't rush; meet them where they are.

LISTEN TO PEOPLE WHO WANT TO SHARE without pressuring them to share. There is no right or wrong way to feel or react.

GIVE ACCURATE INFORMATION without giving false promises or reassurances, like “it will be OK” or “at least things aren’t worse.”

HELP PEOPLE COPE IN HEALTHY WAYS such as prioritizing and focusing on what's in their control, and identifying and using existing coping skills.

CONNECT PEOPLE WITH SERVICES & SOCIAL SUPPORTS that are tailored to what they need. Assess what they need rather than making assumptions.

TEACH SHORT-TERM WAYS TO MANAGE STRONG EMOTIONS like grounding or deep breathing, if emotions interfere with functioning or prevent healthy coping.
GROUNDING
A SHORT-TERM COPING SKILL FOR INTENSE REACTIONS

IS GROUNDING APPROPRIATE?

Is the person unresponsive, panicked, or frantic? Are they stuck in their anxiety?

- NO
- YES

Is the intense reaction interfering with essential duties, threatening safety, or preventing healthy coping?

- NO
- YES

HOW TO PRACTICE GROUNDING

1. Name 5 non-distressing things you can see around you.
2. Name 5 non-distressing sounds you can hear around you.
3. Name 5 non-distressing things you can feel against your skin.

Pause and breathe.

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HELPING PEOPLE COPE IN HEALTHY WAYS

Use a problem-solving approach to define the problem and make a coping plan.

1. Collaboratively assess and prioritize needs and concerns
2. Choose the most pressing controllable issue to address
3. Brainstorm possible solutions to the problem
4. Consider pros and cons and choose a solution
5. Make an action plan for carrying out the solution

HEALTHY COPING IS...
- Consistently meeting basic needs for sleep, nutrition, and health
- Reaching out to others and finding ways to connect, even at a distance
- Expressing your feelings (e.g., journaling, crying, talking to supportive people)
- Doing daily activities that give a sense of pleasure or achievement (e.g., exercise)
- Trying to maintain a normal schedule as much as possible or creating a new routine
- Using calming and compassionate self-talk
- Focusing on things you can control and what you can do about those things

...RATHER THAN
- Sleeping, eating, or taking medicine inconsistently or on an irregular schedule
- Withdrawing from family and friends or waiting for others to reach out to you
- Suppressing negative feelings, including with drugs or alcohol
- Withdrawing from activities or focusing only on activities that aren’t possible at the moment
- Working too many hours or avoiding responsibilities
- Using negative self-talk or treating worries like they’re facts
- Ruminating about things you can’t control or hypothetical situations

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**Psychological First Aid**

**FOR THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

**Support Session Outline**

**Set Up**
- Identify a private place
- Use the HIPAA-compliant version of Zoom, if conducting a video call

**Contact & Engagement**
- Introduce yourself and your organizational affiliation
- Confirm that person is in a private setting
- Orient to the purpose of the contact (i.e., providing supportive listening and/or practical coping skills and resources, not therapy or a crisis line)
- Set a time expectation
  - Build rapport
  - Communicate calm, respect, and compassion

**Gather Information**
- Collaboratively assess needs and priorities without making assumptions

**Provide Coping Information & Referrals**
- Provide basic information about common stress reactions (e.g., intrusive thoughts, avoidance, bodily symptoms, strong negative emotions)
- Work together to identify the person's existing helpful coping strategies and provide information about potential new coping strategies
- Provide referrals and other appropriate links to services if needed (e.g., UW CareLine)
- Encourage brief, ongoing contacts with social supports

**Address Specific Needs**
- If the person is overwhelmed by many different issues
- If the person shares negative emotions or thoughts
- If the person is having a serious distress reaction that interferes with duties, risks safety, or prevents coping

**Provide Practical Assistance**
- Collaboratively prioritize needs and concerns, select an issue to focus on, and develop an action plan

**Listen and Provide Comfort**
- Use active listening, sit with and validate emotions, ask gentle and curious questions about negative thoughts

**Provide Stabilization**
- With permission, teach short-term coping strategies like grounding or deep breathing

**Wrap Up**
- Summarize key take-aways and next steps
- Offer a follow-up if indicated

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**How to Practice Grounding**

1. **Sit comfortably and breathe slowly and deeply.**
2. Name 5 non-distressing things you can **see.**
3. **Pause and breathe.**
4. Name 5 non-distressing sounds you can **hear.**
5. **Pause and breathe.**
6. Name 5 non-distressing things you can **feel.**
7. **Pause and breathe.**

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**Healthy Coping is...**

Consistently meeting basic needs for sleep, nutrition, and health
Reaching out to others and finding ways to connect even at a distance
Expressing feelings in journaling, crying, talking to supportive people
Doing daily activities that give a sense of pleasure or achievement (e.g., exercise)
Maintaining a normal schedule when possible, or creating a new routine
Using calming and compassionate self-talk
Focusing on what you can control and what you can do about those things

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**DO**

- Collaboratively assess needs and priorities
- Meet them where they are
- Share concrete, simple, factual information and reassurances, use jargon
- Communicate calm, compassion, and respect
- Take the person's culture into account
- Acknowledge strengths
- Be aware of the limitations of your role
- Sit with and acknowledge difficult emotions
- Try to take their pain away or cheer them up

---

**DON'T**

- Make assumptions about their needs or priorities
- Pressure them into sharing details of their story
- Make false promises or guarantees
- Rush the person or talk about your own troubles
- Assume their worldview or way of coping is the same as yours
- Judge their reactions, focus only on problems
- Think or act as if you need to solve all of their problems
- Try to take their pain away or cheer them up

---

**Is the person unresponsive, panicky, or frantic? Are they stuck in their anxiety?**

- NO

---

**Is the intense reaction interfering with essential duties, threatening safety, or preventing healthy coping?**

- NO

---

**Is this likely a one-time reaction in a crisis?**

- YES

---

**Is grounding not appropriate?**

- NO

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**Is grounding likely appropriate?**

- YES

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Please complete the evaluation survey!

http://tiny.cc/4ugrmz