



Psychological First Aid (PFA)

General Guidelines for Addressing Mental Health Needs in the School Environment

PFA is an evidence-informed approach for assisting children, adolescents, adults, and families in the immediate aftermath of a critical incident, disaster, or terrorism. PFA is designed to reduce the initial distress caused by traumatic events and to foster short and long-term adaptive functioning.

Responding to a Campus Lock Down

1 LISTEN to what they say and how they act.

- Follow District guidelines and procedures regarding school lock downs.
- Give students, parents/guardians, and staff reassurance, support, and encouragement.
- Pay attention to any expressed feelings of fear and/or concern.
- Observe nonverbal communication. Remember that individuals may also show their feelings in nonverbal ways, such as through anger, crying, or withdrawal.
- *Note: Be aware that a campus lock down may trigger trauma reminders.*

2 PROTECT by maintaining structure, stability, and consistency.

- Continue to follow directives as indicated by the Incident Commander (i.e., school site administrator, Educational Service Center administrator, law enforcement) to ensure the safety and protection of students, staff, and parents/guardians.
- Establish a pre-arranged reunification area for parents/guardians to meet with their children.
- Reassure students, parents/guardians, and staff by explaining that the lock down procedure is meant to establish the safety of everyone on campus.
- Limit access to smart phones, the Internet, or live television that may show disturbing scenes or inaccurate information about the event.
- Whenever possible, maintain classroom/office routines, activities, and structure with clear expectations, as well as consistent rules.
- *Note: Do not make judgmental statements, spread rumors, or place blame regarding the event.*

3 CONNECT through communication, resources, and referrals.

- Explain the responsibility to report in the event that an individual is a witness to an incident or has information regarding the incident.
- Explain your duty to protect and keep students safe.
- "Check in" with students on a regular basis.
- Become familiar with learning support staff at your school (e.g., Psychiatric Social Worker, PSA Counselor, School

- Psychologist, Counselor, Nurse) and refer to the appropriate person who can offer support to student(s).
- Explore opportunities for all school staff to safely support one another.
- In the aftermath of a critical event, triage/screen students and/or staff most at risk for trauma, as appropriate. Those in closest physical proximity to the critical event or in closest emotional proximity to the victims/experience should be identified. The greater the exposure or physical proximity to a critical event or violent act/attack, the greater the risk of trauma. Consequently, there is a more immediate need to provide a sense of physical and emotional safety.
- *Note: Do not make promises or false assurances.*

4 MODEL calm and optimistic behavior.

- It is good to be aware of your thoughts, feelings, and reactions about the event. They can affect your students; they will likely be watching you for both verbal and nonverbal cues and it may influence how your students cope and behave.
- Take constructive actions to assure safety.
- Monitor conversations, text messages, and phone calls that students may engage in during the event. Inaccurate or incomplete information can lead to misunderstandings, escalation, and/or trauma reactions.
- *Note: Do not express shock or anger at the possible perpetrator or event.*

5 TEACH about normal stress symptoms and how to cope.

- Students, staff, and parents/guardians may have different reactions, even to the same event. Individuals may also require different amounts of time to cope and adjust.
- Encourage students, staff, and parents/guardians to identify and use positive coping strategies to help them after the event.
- Encourage students, staff, and parents/guardians to re-establish their daily routine and activities as soon as possible.
- *Note: Over time and with support, individuals generally do better after a stressful event. If they do not, they should be encouraged and taught to seek assistance from a school support staff, community agency, or health care provider.*