

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 Sexual Abuse or Exploitation – For Parents

1 LISTEN to what they say and how they act.

- Observe nonverbal communication. Remember that children who have been sexually abused or exploited may display a range of emotional and behavioral reactions (e.g., difficulties sleeping, withdrawn behavior, depression, fear of certain people or places).
- Make time throughout the day to interact with your children and become familiar with who they interact with and what they are doing. Remind children that they can come to you when they need help or want to talk.

2 PROTECT by maintaining structure, stability, and consistency.

- Structure, stability and consistency are important for children to feel safe.
- Remind children that you are the adult and are there to protect them. Inform children that they should never keep a secret for fear that someone might be hurt.
- Educate children at a young age about body safety and how they can protect themselves.
- Establish clear expectations and rules about “okay” and “not okay” touches. Give children permission to say “no” to an adult when they are asked to do something uncomfortable.
- It is important not to express doubt or disbelief if a child discloses abuse to you. Fear of not being believed is one of the reasons that children do not disclose.

3 CONNECT through interaction, activities and resources.

- If a child discloses abuse or exploitation, thank the child for telling you and reassure him/her of your support.
- If you have concerns that your child may have been sexually abused, take your child to a physician. Your physician can discuss your concerns, examine your child, and make necessary referrals and reports.
- If you know or suspect that a child is being or has been sexually abused, call the Childhelp National Child Abuse Hotline at 800.422.4453 or for immediate assistance, call 911.
- Connect children with the appropriate mental health and health services, as needed.

4 MODEL calm and optimistic behavior.

- It is good to be aware of your thoughts, feelings and reactions. They can affect your child. Your child will be watching for both verbal and nonverbal cues, and it may influence how your child copes and behaves. If a child discloses abuse, it is important to remain calm, continue to listen, and never blame the child.
- Receiving information about abuse is likely difficult to hear and process. You might experience a range of emotions, such as sadness, anger, or become tearful or cry. It is important to share with the child why you are feeling this way. For example, “I am not angry at you, I am angry at what happened to you and at the person who hurt you.” Or “I am crying because I am sad about what happened to you.”
- Show children the importance of advocating for others and asking for support by seeking help when someone you know has been abused. It is all right to get help when you are going through a difficult experience.

5 TEACH strategies for personal safety and how to seek help.

- Children may have different reactions, even to the same event.
- Teach children about “okay” and “not okay” touch.
- Teach children that no adult should ask them to play games and keep any secrets or to play secretive games.
- Teach children that no adult should ask them to touch their private body parts or to touch themselves.
- As children age, create an environment at home in which sexual topics can be discussed comfortably.
- Teach your child(ren) help seeking behaviors.
- Help your child(ren) identify who they can go to for support, at home and at school.
- Teach children that sometimes even the people we trust and love do things that are hurtful, but that does not make it okay.
- Teach children to say something until someone believes them and helps them.

