



# 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 Child Abuse

### 1 LISTEN to what they say and how they act.

- Just listen and pay attention to the child.
- Observe nonverbal communication. Remember that children may also show their feelings in nonverbal ways, such as increased behavioral problems or increased withdrawal.
- *Note: Do not investigate or probe for details; this may trigger trauma reminders or compromise a legal investigation if questions are leading.*

### 2 PROTECT by maintaining structure, stability, and consistency.

- Follow District guidelines and procedures regarding notification of an administrator.
- Children need to hear that what happened is not their fault and that they did the right thing by telling.
- Conduct the discussion in private and reassure the child that the disclosure enables adults to help and protect.
- Maintain daily routines, activities, and structure with clear expectations and consistent rules.
- *Note: Do not express doubt or disbelief.*
- *Note: Do not make judgmental statements or place blame.*



### 3 CONNECT through interaction, activities and resources.

- Explain your responsibility to report.
- Explain your duty to protect and keep children safe.
- Consider referring the child to learning support staff (e.g., Psychiatric Social Worker, PSA Counselor, School Psychologist, Counselor, Nurse) and finding resources on campus that can offer support to the child.
- “Check in” with children on a regular basis.
- *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 children. Your children will be watching you for both verbal and nonverbal cues and it will influence how your children cope and behave.
- Monitor conversations that children may hear.
- *Note: Do not express shock or anger at the possible perpetrator or event.*
- *Note: Children often love the person who mistreats them.*

### 5 TEACH about normal changes that can occur when traumatized.

- Children may have different reactions, even to the same event.
- Encourage your children to identify and use positive coping strategies to help them after the event.
- Help your children problem solve to get through each day successfully.
- Help children set small “doable” goals and share in these achievements as “wins.”
- *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.*