

# PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID FOR SCHOOLS

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# Appendix A: Recommendations for School Staff



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## Providing Psychological First Aid: Principals and Administrators

During and following an emergency, you will be responsible for the health and safety of your students and staff. They will look to you for guidance on how best to proceed. You may need to coordinate assistance from city, state, county, and/or federal agencies. You may be overwhelmed by the need to make myriad immediate decisions, predict unknown variables, and be accountable to the district and the community at large. Below are suggestions for how to implement PFA-S.

### PFA-S Core Action 1: Contact and Engagement

**Provide Leadership:** To be most effective, be visible to the school community, delegate extensively, and provide steady, reassuring, and accessible leadership. Call on your school's district and community partners for their help and resources. Avoid closing off the school to agencies that can help in recovery. When you delegate specific and appropriate roles to your staff, they will feel more empowered and better able to stabilize students, parents, and others.

**Reach out to Those Affected:** Make contact with groups most affected by the incident, including family members of deceased students/staff, injured and hospitalized individuals, and staff members who have been directly affected. If you are unable to make contact, assign an administrative designee. In addition, assign a staff member to act as the Liaison Officer with community services (e.g., police, fire, mental health) and other response organizations.

**Consider Consultation:** If your safety plan does not apply to the incident at hand, contact the school district's emergency office, other local and state resources, or other administrators familiar with similar events to help you with the series of decisions you will have to make. You might also contact disaster mental health experts who have developed school-based recovery programs. Your state education agency, the US Department of Education, or local professional organizations can help identify such experts.

### PFA-S Core Action 2: Safety and Comfort

**Provide Regular Updates:** Communicate regularly about the situation and services offered at the school or in the community. Set up mechanisms, such as staff meetings, to get updates from teachers and other staff members about ongoing safety concerns.

**Address Identified Safety Concerns:** Use a multidisciplinary team (including police, legal advisor, and school counselor) to assess and address the safety concerns of students, staff, and/or families. Consider developing a Threat Assessment Team, if your school does not already have one, so that students, staff, and parents have a reporting system through which they can anonymously share critical, sensitive information or report rumors.

**Limit Media Access:** Work with the district or your Public Information Officer on which messages will be released about the event, when, and how. Maintain a good working relationship with local media and provide regular updates in a pre-designated location during and after the emergency. Enforce policies to limit the amount of media exposure on school grounds. Monitor media stories to see how they may influence the safety concerns of the school community.

**Help Manage Grief:** Give special attention to those affected directly by the incident. Form a group of representative administrators, teachers, student leaders, community leaders, and parents to decide about memorial events, displays, or other ways to honor those who died, when temporary displays should be removed, and what information to include in the yearbook or how to honor the deceased at graduations.

### PFA-S Core Action 3: Stabilization

**Stabilize the School Environment:** You can be a calming influence in the days and weeks after an incident. Stay visible. Try to greet students and staff as they enter school, visit classrooms, attend student gatherings or activities and/or community meetings.

**Identify Possible Reminders:** Meet with staff as soon as possible to discuss possible reminders of the incident within the school setting. Sounds, sights, or specific areas of the school may cause significant distress to others. Take steps, to the extent possible, to eliminate potential reminders. Remember: what serves as a memorial for some may serve as a trauma/loss reminder for others.

**Identify Students at Risk:** Make sure there are mechanisms in place to monitor those who need additional mental health support and other services. Encourage trainings be offered to all staff highlighting the common courses of recovery, signs of risk, and how to promote recovery.

### PFA-S Core Action 4: Information Gathering

**Become Fully Informed about the Incident:** Take the time to understand fully what happened. When “mapping” the event, identify which groups may have been more affected than others. Obtain information from interviews, attendance records, nursing and/or teacher reports, police reports, and crisis team debriefing meetings. In a multi-agency response to an emergency, make sure a member of your administration is part of the Incident Command System.

**Actively Reach out to Students:** Work actively with your staff to identify how students are coping. Establish clear lines of communication and referral between staff and school counselors. You may want to encourage your health-related staff to conduct brief screenings to proactively identify students who are in need of additional support.

### PFA-S Core Action 5: Practical Assistance

**Coordinate Donations and Volunteers:** Other schools and community agencies may offer their assistance, and donations may arrive from various sources. Assign a staff member to monitor and coordinate these efforts; otherwise, you may be overwhelmed trying to manage such donations.

### PFA-S Core Action 6: Connection with Social Supports

**Integrate New Students:** Students who have been through an emergency may transfer to your school temporarily or permanently. Encourage staff to integrate these students into the school culture and orient them to the school procedures as quickly as possible. Avoid singling out these students in a way that alienates them from the rest of the student body.

**Establish Peer-to-Peer Programs:** Help students reach out to each other. Peer-to-peer programs facilitate a sense of belonging among students and help connect incoming students to peers.

**Maintain School Community Connections:** If your school is unable to reopen immediately, establish ways students can get in contact with each other (e.g., website, social media, an event).

## PFA-S Core Action 7: Information on Coping

**Provide Psychoeducation and Information:** Hold staff and parent meetings as soon as possible. Clarify what happened, describe available resources, and explain next steps. Be prepared for intense conversations and questions that you do not have answers to yet. Have a team, that includes police (when relevant) and mental health professionals, with you to address these questions.

**Promote Your School as an Environment for Recovery:** Stress that there are different courses of recovery and that you are doing your best to put in place policies and procedures that will support recovery and promote learning and academic functioning. Let individuals know if the school will continue to provide services for those having difficulties in the future or will provide additional support (staff, respite, resources) for staff dealing with their own recovery.

**Maintain School/Academic Routines:** Students do better when they can return to their regular routine. Reopen school as quickly as possible, help reestablish school routines, and make modifications as needed. For example, advise teachers if they should consider adjusting their teaching plan and to be prepared to postpone some events if safety concerns remain.

## PFA-S Core Action 8: Link with Collaborative Services

**Activate Mutual Aid Agreements:** Contact agencies with whom your school has preexisting mutual aid agreements and identify others needed to assist in your school's recovery.

**Seek and Apply for Funding:** Financial resources may be available to provide services to those affected by the crisis (e.g., Victims of Crime, American Red Cross) or to your school (e.g., Dept. of Ed Project SERV grants; SAMHSA SERG grants). Research the agency's sites regarding eligibility requirements and assign staff to work on the applications.

In the days and weeks following an emergency, the school becomes a recovery milieu. Due to your leadership role, you will be under extraordinary stress at this time. Secondary traumatic stress is common for those in these positions. As you create an environment to promote recovery in those around you, be sure to practice self-care. In doing so, you will model self-care for your staff and students, and you will be able to meet your responsibilities most effectively.



## Providing Psychological First Aid: Teachers

During an emergency, your primary responsibility is the safety and welfare of you and your students. When classes resume, you may feel the need to return to academics quickly. However, to best promote long-term recovery and to help students return to their pre-crisis ability to concentrate and function academically, be sure to talk to them about the recovery process and address any safety concerns. You may want to modify the classroom curriculum temporarily, take extra time to cover certain material, or postpone possibly distressing subject matter. Below are suggestions on how to implement PFA-S.

### PFA-S Core Action 1: Contact and Engagement

**Take the Initiative:** Students may withdraw or have other difficulties recovering from the crisis and fail to seek help. Actively reach out to students, especially those you have a good relationship with. If they aren't willing to talk with you, seek out another staff member who may be able to help. Speak in private if you can and be discreet.

**Seek Consultation:** It is impossible to prepare for every scenario that may occur or every concern students may have. Consult the school's mental health professional or have him/her visit your class to give information and answer students' questions.

### PFA-S Core Action 2: Safety and Comfort

**Reassure Students:** In the days and weeks after the incident, students may continue to show signs of emotional distress or concern. Reassure them that they can come to you with such concerns and/or inform them of the procedures in place to get help.

**Report Safety Concerns:** Be alert to safety concerns about subsequent incidents or rumors, and report any such rumors or threats immediately to the school's Safety Officer or administration.

**Help Manage Grief:** If a student is struggling with the death of a friend or loved one, provide appropriate emotional support. After identifying the needs of the student, notify the school's mental health professional of the situation and modify academic assignments as needed.

**Provide Information about the Event:** Consider these guidelines when talking with students:

- ✓ Be truthful and share information in a developmentally appropriate way.
- ✓ Discourage discussion about details of any death or disturbing aspects of the event.
- ✓ Provide a timeline of upcoming school activities (clearing of debris, removal of memorial displays, rebuilding efforts).
- ✓ Work with the students in planning memorial tributes or displays. Inform them about any applicable school procedures or restrictions.
- ✓ Encourage students to participate in prosocial service activities (volunteer days, fund raising events). Help students assemble cards, letters, and memory books for the families of the victims, but ensure that the content of such materials is appropriate.

### PFA-S Core Action 3: Stabilization

**Stabilize the School Environment:** Calmly convey to your students that the staff and administration are continuing to monitor the situation and will attempt to address any concerns they might have. Students are often anxious when facing trauma-related chaos, changes, and transitions. Providing them with a calm, supportive environment with clear rules and expectations will help them regain a sense of security and normalcy.

**Identify Possible Reminders:** Take steps, to the extent possible, to eliminate potential reminders in your classroom that may cause distress (e.g., substitute potentially distressing lesson plans, remove hanging pictures of the crisis on the walls). If a student does become reactive, calmly provide emotional support or refer him/her to the school's health/mental health professional.

### PFA-S Core Action 4: Information Gathering

**Know Common Signs of Distress:** Watch and listen for any students who show signs of distress or changes in behavior and refer them to the appropriate professionals. Signs of distress vary by age and developmental level and can include:

- Poor control of emotions
- Anger and moodiness
- Frustration and anxiety
- Social withdrawal
- Change in academic performance or in attendance
- Trouble with concentration, memory, cognition, and organization
- Physical symptoms like headaches and stomachs
- Risk-taking, unpredictable, and/or impulsive behavior
- Intense reactions to reminders of the event

**Identify Students Needing Services:** If you see changes in a student, ask directly how he/she is doing. Many students will not tell someone they are having difficulty until they are directly asked. Also ask the student if he/she knows of any classmates who may need help. They are often aware of changes in their peers.

### PFA-S Core Action 5: Practical Assistance

**Identify Students with Resource Needs:** Help to identify students' needs, such as school supplies, tutoring, or uniforms. If a student has transferred from another school system, find out if they have an IEP, whether there are accommodations to meet personalized plans, or other academic needs.

**Help Families:** You may be able to help students' families with their needs and concerns by directing them to appropriate support staff and resources. Reassure them of the steps the school is taking to promote recovery. Use a part of staff meetings to discuss some of these needs and concerns so that administration can problem-solve ways how to address them (e.g., identify additional community resources, use of donation funds).

## PFA-S Core Action 6: Connection with Social Supports

**Integrate New Students:** Students from other schools may transfer to your school temporarily or permanently. Attempt to integrate new students into your class as soon as possible. Introduce them to other students with similar interests (sports, arts, clubs) or from similar neighborhoods. Avoid singling out these students in a way that could alienate them from the rest of the student body. Be aware that they will be missing their old friends and strategize ways to reconnect them if possible.

**Increase In-Class Interaction:** You will want to encourage interaction among students to facilitate social support. Increase the number of group activities and collaborative assignments. Encourage reconnection with family, friends, and members of their faith communities. Provide information about upcoming community events and give details about these events with added precautions. Thus, give details about events and add precautions if you are concerned that some students may not be ready for some events (e.g., memorials).

## PFA-S Core Action 7: Information on Coping

**Address Concerns:** Schedule time with students to listen to their concerns about the incident. Correct misconceptions they may have about recovery. Schedule this discussion early in the day and when there is enough time to address all concerns.

**Maintain Structure:** Help students' recovery by keeping to the regular classroom structure as best you can. Students benefit from predictability and consistency. When children need to change teachers and/or classrooms, make the new setting as similar as possible to the previous one. If this is not possible, discuss the losses and changes as a group.

**Provide Support:** Students may exhibit more defiant, hyperactive, and/or distractive behaviors in your classroom. Remain calm and provide clear instructions of the behavior you expect. Praise students for appropriate, on-task behavior and for using effective coping skills. To assist students to be more organized, breakdown assignments into manageable parts and encourage them to write them in their planners.

## PFA-S Core Action 8: Link with Collaborative Services

**Provide Information on Available Services:** All families, students, and staff need to know the location of school and community services and the steps required to access these services. If you are unsure of the appropriate and available resources, refer the individual in need to support staff who have that information. Have psychoeducational and informational materials available for parents in order to address their questions.

**Follow up on Recommendations:** Check in with students and parents to make sure that they are getting the services or resources you have recommended. If not, review the plan and adjust it accordingly.

In the days and weeks following an emergency, the school often becomes a recovery milieu. You play a vital role in the recovery of the students and the school community. You serve as the primary contact person for students throughout the course of the day by watching out for the welfare of students, identifying those who are struggling and getting them help, and providing updated and accurate information which you obtain through staff meetings and from the school administration. By utilizing the suggestions in this handout, you can help students recover and succeed academically, psychologically, and socially. These strategies can also help you and your family. Most importantly, don't forget to take care of yourself during these stressful times.



## Providing Psychological First Aid: Health-Related Professionals

You play a unique role in caring for the needs of the school community during and after times of crisis. The acute phase is not the time to provide therapy. It is the time for immediate assistance to those affected by the emergency. If you are called to a situation that is beyond your usual scope of practice, do not hesitate to consult providers more experienced in this type of event. If you are from an outside agency responding to a school crisis, you may be more helpful by assisting staff and parents than providing direct care to those most impacted, freeing the school health and mental health staff to provide the direct support needed after such events.

### PFA-S Core Action 1: Contact and Engagement

**Be Aware of Cultural and Developmental Issues:** Before working directly with students and staff, learn about the school culture and the cultural and developmental issues of the survivors to whom you will be providing services. Modify contact based on these factors.

**Reach out to Those Affected:** Outreach to students and staff, even though they may avoid asking for or seeking help. If you are new to the school, work with teachers or other staff who are more familiar with the school community. At a minimum, talk to school officials about the individuals who were most impacted in the emergency, and find out if there are prior events or situations that may put this group at increased risk for distress.

**Work as a Team:** Always work within the Incident Command System and within a team, so that you can utilize each member's unique skill sets. Communicate frequently with your team to learn about changing needs and concerns.

**Plan for Students' Ongoing Needs:** Students with the greatest exposure and those who have experienced a death or witnessed the death of a friend or loved one will need continuing support at school. Make sure a school staff member is assigned to support these individuals, rather than a PFA provider from the community who may not be able to assist the students' long-term needs.

### PFA-S Core Action 2: Safety and Comfort

**Ensure Safety:** Ask staff and students if they have any current safety concerns at school. Listen for rumors or threats of subsequent incidents, and report any such rumors or threats immediately to the school's Safety Officer or administration.

**Watch for High-Risk Behavior:** Students may increase substance use or participate in other high-risk behaviors (e.g., driving recklessly, initiating fights), endangering themselves or others. Students are the first to know if a peer is troubled, so ask them directly if they are concerned about anyone's safety. Address these concerns immediately. Seek additional assistance if needed (e.g., school resource officer, threat assessment team).

**Support Those Overwhelmed with Grief:** Support and comfort those overwhelmed with the death of a friend or family member. You might work with teachers on how to talk to their class about the death of a student or staff member, help administration with memorial events and displays, and/or assess at-risk students.

### PFA-S Core Action 3: Stabilization

**Identify Vulnerable Students and Staff:** Those with a history of prior mental health problems or who have had similar past traumas may have more difficulty in the current crisis. Be sure to ask about prior experiences and coping strategies. Check in with these individuals frequently, particularly if there are continuing safety concerns at the school. Be aware that they may have distressing reactions to reminders of former traumatic events or may become unstable, more so than the rest of the school population. Offer to guide them in relaxation and grounding techniques, and check back with them to assess how they are doing.

**Differentiate between Physical and Emotional Distress:** Some students and staff members may present with physical reactions and may have frequent visits to the nurse or a medical doctor. Ask about their experience during the crisis and how they are coping. Find out if the physical reactions are related to the recent trauma (e.g., Did the symptoms start around the time of the event? Do they become more severe when the person is reminded of the event?), and consider a referral to a mental health specialist.

### PFA-S Core Action 4: Information Gathering

**Know All You Can about the Incident:** Find out what happened during the event and who was affected. When “mapping” the event, learn which individuals may have been more impacted than others. Obtain information from interviews, attendance records, nursing and/or teacher reports, police reports, and crisis team debriefing meetings.

**Develop a Referral System:** Educate staff members as to how they can refer students for evaluation or services. Provide staff psychoeducation on common risk factors and developmentally-specific signs that a student is at risk. Routinely ask teachers about how their students are behaving in the classroom and whether they have any concerns.

**Proactively Screen/Assess Students and Staff:** Use standardized measures to screen students and staff in terms of their experiences during the event in order to identify those in distress. Systematic screening is the most effective way to identify those who are at risk or who need additional services.

### PFA-S Core Action 5: Practical Assistance

**Don't Underestimate the Importance of Practical Assistance:** Assisting with practical needs is a protective factor that enhances recovery. You are in a key position to identify the needs of students and staff and to identify barriers to obtaining resources. Link staff and students to support staff or to an agency contact who can provide these services.

**Coordinate Needs:** Work with your team leader to ensure that requests for supplies (food, water, toys) are relayed up the chain of command. Also work with families to help with such things as transportation, recouping costs from recovery, and so forth. While some of these activities may be beyond your typical job responsibilities, coordinating practical needs is essential and may require you to expand your role.

### PFA-S Core Action 6: Connection with Social Supports

**Establish Social Connectedness Programs:** Develop venues to increase interaction among students and staff. You might facilitate group discussions on various health- or mental health-related topics pertinent to the crisis, or you might help publicize upcoming, supportive community events. Encourage individuals to reconnect with their family members, friends, and members of their faith community or other social or community organization. For students, make recommendations specific to extramural student group activities or facilitate a peer-to-peer program that may provide a venue for social support.

**Integrate New Students:** Students may transfer to other schools temporarily or permanently. Attempt to integrate these students into the school culture and orient them to the school procedures as quickly as possible. Avoid singling out these students in ways that might alienate them from the rest of the student body. For example, too much attention from faculty and staff may result in peers distancing themselves from the new students. Do try to connect these students with former friends or classmates, as connectedness is an important protective factor.

### PFA-S Core Action 7: Information on Coping

**Meet with Parents:** Attend the parents' meetings and provide information about common reactions, address safety concerns, and discuss available resources. Be prepared for these meetings to be stressful, as parents will be anxious and may have significant safety concerns. Parents, like students and staff, cope best when provided with support. School-sponsored meetings can provide parents with the opportunity to build their own social support network. Always conduct these meetings in partnership with the administration and law enforcement.

**No One Way to Recover:** You will often get questions about the natural course of recovery. Emphasize that there is no one "right" way to recover and that different people will recover at different points in time. Most importantly, emphasize that everyone should respect individual differences. To this end, teach students and staff about typical reactions after emergencies, trauma/loss reminders, reestablish schedules and routines, and effective coping strategies.

### PFA-S Core Action 8: Link with Collaborative Services

**Provide Information on Available Services:** Inform families, students, and staff about the location of mental health and other services and the steps required to access them. You may have to broaden your list of community services to fully address the students' and staff members' current needs.

**Update the Referral List to Include Trauma and Loss-Informed Services:** Do the research to make sure that the providers on the referral list have experience in the type of event that occurred. If you have or are given a standard referral list, review it in light of the situation; and do your best to add the names of professionals who can offer more specialized, developmentally appropriate, and trauma/loss-informed services.

**Facilitate Access to Services:** To ensure that students and staff are connected with relevant services, help make the calls, double-check that the agency is accepting referrals, and address any concerns students or staff members might have about the services.

In the days and weeks following an emergency, the school becomes a recovery milieu. Health-related professionals play an important role in monitoring the course of recovery of the students and staff. By actively reaching out to the school community, creating a referral system, and providing state-of-the-art services and programs, health-related professionals can help the school stabilize and accelerate recovery. Secondary traumatic stress is common for those in the helping professions and in leadership roles. As you create an environment to promote recovery in those around you, be sure to practice your own self-care.



## Providing Psychological First Aid: Support Staff

You are a valuable resource in times of crisis and an integral part of the school's recovery. Prior to any crisis, it is important that you know your school's emergency plan. Be familiar with the Incident Command Structure and procedures. Know where to ask questions or seek more information. School Resource Officers should coordinate plan with community responders to make sure that plans are familiar to all who may respond and are consistent. Below are ways that you can implement PFA-S.

### PFA-S Core Action 1: Contact & Engagement

**Remain Calm:** In your various duties, you will be around students, parents, and other adults who may be in distress or expressing strong emotions. By remaining calm, this can help others calm.

**Take the Initiative:** Initiating contact and conversation can help to identify students or adults who may need assistance. Conversation starters can be as simple as "Do you need anything?" or "Are you ok?" Offering practical assistance (food, water) can help to initiate contact.

**Monitor Changes in Others:** Be watchful of changes in behavior in students or staff (e.g., not as talkative, changes in attire, less social, appears more angry). Report your concerns to the appropriate person at the school, such as a health-related professional or administration.

### PFA-S Core Action 2: Safety & Comfort

**Reassure Current Safety:** Inform students that the adults are there to protect them and keep them safe. If the emergency is over, students, especially younger children, may need to be repeatedly told of their safety. Even when the emergency is still ongoing, children need to be assured that everything possible is being done to keep them safe.

**Ensure Continued Safety:** This may include assisting in the evacuation of a school or monitoring the interactions of others in a reunification area. When children are anxious, they often act out. If students are behaving in an unsafe manner, calmly convey the rules and what is expected of them. If the behavior continues, alert the school resource officer or administration.

**Watch for High-Risk Student Behavior:** After a crisis, students may increase substance use or participate in other high-risk behaviors (e.g., driving recklessly, initiating fights), endangering themselves or others. If you see this behavior or hear such concerns, report the matter to administration or school resource officer.

### PFA-S Core Action 3: Stabilization

**Support Those Overwhelmed:** Some students and staff may show signs of distress. Remain calm and see if the person calms after a few minutes. See if you can assist with any current needs or reassure current safety. If the individual has difficulty calming, seek out a health-related professional to provide further assistance.

**Stabilize the School Environment:** Calmly convey to the students that the staff and administration are continuing to monitor the situation and will address any concerns they might have. Students are often anxious when facing trauma-related chaos, changes, and transitions. Providing them with a calm, supportive environment with clear rules and expectations will help them regain a sense of security and normalcy.

**Identify Possible Reminders:** Take steps, to the extent possible, to eliminate potential reminders in the school that may cause distress to others (e.g., not using the same signal to call the custodian that was used in the emergency).

## PFA-S Core Action 4: Information Gathering

**Identify Current Needs:** Ask simple, respectful questions to determine how you may help. If the person needs assistance beyond what you can offer, connect them to a teacher, health-related professional, or whoever else is needed.

**Know the Referral System:** Make sure you are educated about how to refer students who need help. Learn about the warning signs and developmentally-specific signs that a student is at-risk.

## PFA-S Core Action 5: Practical Assistance

**Don't Underestimate the Importance of Practical Assistance:** Assisting with practical needs is a protective factor that enhances recovery. You can play an important role in identifying the needs of students and staff and to identify barriers to obtaining resources. Link students and staff to those who are coordinating services at the school or an agency contact who can provide these services in the community.

**Attend to Needs:** Ensure that requests for supplies and delivery of items requested are coordinated and communicated throughout the staff. Work with other staff to help with such things as transportation, monitoring the reunification site, and so forth. While some of these activities may be beyond your typical job responsibilities, helping with practical needs is essential and may require you to expand your role.

## PFA-S Core Action 6: Connection with Social Supports

**Help to Connect with Supports:** Help students to connect with family members, teachers, aides, coaches, or those they find as a comfort. Also help students to gather together and encourage them to support each other. You can make recommendations specific to extramural student group activities that may provide a venue for social support.

**Keep Watch for Withdrawn Students:** Observe students who may be isolating or limiting their social interactions with others. Check in with students and ask if they are okay. For new students, introduce yourself and welcome them.

## PFA-S Core Action 7: Information on Coping

**Provide a Recovery Milieu:** After a crisis, all at the school should create an environment that enhances recovery. Encourage those that need help to seek support or other assistance during the school day as needed.

**No One Way to Recover:** You could often get questions from others about the natural course of recovery. Emphasize that there is not one way to recover and that different people will recover at different points in time. Most importantly, emphasize that everyone should respect individual differences.

## PFA-S Core Action 8: Link with Collaborative Services

**Provide Information on Available Services:** In coordination with school policy, pass out handouts or know the official websites that will list available services at the school and in the community and the steps required to access them.

**Facilitate Access to Services:** To ensure that students and staff get connected to relevant services, help make the calls, double-check that the agency is accepting referrals, and address any concerns students or staff might have about the services.

In the days and weeks following an emergency, the school often becomes a recovery milieu. Everyone plays an important role in the recovery of the students and the school community. By utilizing the suggestions in this handout, you can help students recover and succeed academically, psychologically, and socially. These strategies can also help you and your family. Most importantly, don't forget to take care of yourself during these stressful times.

# Appendix B: Guidelines for Using PFA-S in a Group Format



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## PFA Guidelines for Assemblies

Following a school emergency, school leaders may hold an assembly to present themselves to staff and students to reassure those in attendance that the leadership is actively involved and in control. At an assembly, school leaders should (1) provide information about the event, (2) describe available resources, and (3) give psychoeducation about potential reactions. *Do not implement PFA in an assembly or other large group format.* You may describe the basic elements of PFA-S during an assembly, and then apply PFA-S techniques in smaller follow-up groups.

### Caution:

If a school chooses to have an assembly, assign non-distressed adults to watch for students who appear emotionally overwhelmed. Be prepared to make alternative arrangements for these students, such as having adults accompany them to a safe, supervised location, if they cannot or choose not to participate in the assembly. Students who find it difficult to sit still and pay attention in large groups will likely find it even harder to do so during a time of emotional stress.

If a student has died, speak with the family before sharing information. As time passes, continue to talk to the family about any additional information you wish to share with the students and staff. Notify the school community of the death of a student or staff member only in small groups, not in a large assembly.

Follow these steps when leading an assembly:

### Step 1: Preparation and Introduction

- Don't do it alone! No one person should run an assembly. In addition to speakers, have at least one adult assistant per 10-20 students. Assistants can stand at the periphery of the auditorium and provide support to students who become distraught or try to leave.
- Be sensitive to the needs of young children, who can be overstimulated by the crowding and noise or large auditorium settings. Allow parents to attend an assembly with young children to provide them with comfort and support.
- Have PFA-S providers and/or mental health professionals on hand to support those students and staff who need it.
- Introduce yourself and highlight the strengths of the school.
- Introduce any new staff members or resource persons who are part of the recovery efforts (e.g., PFA-S providers, mental health professionals, additional security).
- Point out the assistants and explain their role.

### Step 2: Describe the Purpose

- Explain that the purpose of the assembly is to provide information about what is happening and to describe the resources that are available to help in the school's recovery.
- If the assembly is open to parents or other community members, announce this and welcome them.

### Step 3: Provide Information

- Report only the facts about the incident that have been validated by emergency command.
- Be aware of the developmental level of the students in the assembly and target your information to their level.
- Address and dispel rumors.
- Provide psychoeducation about the types of reactions that students and staff can expect to experience now and in the near future.
- When appropriate, have experts present who can describe technical aspects of the situation (e.g., a police officer can describe the safety procedures; an engineer can address air quality concerns).
- Limit the information to that which the school community needs to know and can handle. Do not discuss the event in detail. Make sure you get parent consent before giving any information about a particular child.
- Identify any changes to the school routine or environment (e.g., more security on campus, modified test schedules, that the gym is being used as a shelter).

### Step 4: Moments of Silence

- Consider a moment of silence near the beginning of the assembly in honor of those impacted by the event.
- Do not have a moment of silence at the end of an assembly.
- Do not let the assembly become a memorial service. Memorials may occur later in a more appropriate setting.

### Step 5: Discuss the Resources Available

- Describe the assistance available at the school and in the community.
- Describe the referral process and any funding options for additional services (e.g., Victims of Crime, American Red Cross).
- Review the steps that the community and responders are taking to address safety concerns.
- Briefly describe PFA-S; describe when and where PFA-S services are available.

### Step 6: Describe How the School Will Move Forward

- Discuss the steps the school and the district will take to recover and the ways that administrators, staff, and students can actively participate.
- Provide a concrete plan for how students and staff can get ongoing assistance.

## PFA Guidelines for Classroom Interventions

The classroom is a familiar setting that helps reestablish routine and fosters students' supporting one another. Take into account the developmental level of the students and modify interventions accordingly. Where a classroom has been the site of a violent incident or the death of a student or teacher, modify these guidelines to address this and spend more time with this group. Try to implement PFA-S early in the day, so that teachers and staff can observe student reactions and provide appropriate support.

### Classroom Alert:

Providing PFA-S in the classroom can give students the information they need and teach them ways to cope, while allowing them to support and comfort each other. Although they are in the same class and know each other, students may have vastly different experiences of the event. Structure the session so that students do not become distressed by their classmates' descriptions of their experience. If students do spend time talking or drawing pictures about the event, reserve time before the group ends to focus on more hopeful thoughts and to teach them skills for coping with their feelings.

Structure the group by saying something like:

"Even though you all are part of the same class and you all went through the event, you each had a different experience. Because the group is time limited, we won't be able to hear in detail what happened to each of you. What's actually more helpful is for you to problem-solve with each other and to learn helpful ways to cope with the feelings and thoughts you are having. We will update you about what has been happening and about the kinds of resources available to help you during this difficult time."

### Core Action 1: Contact and Engagement

- Conduct the group with another provider.
- Before the group, have the teacher identify any student who may need to be excused from this intervention or who is the subject of concern.
- Include the teacher in the discussion so that s/he can address questions that may arise at a later date. When a teacher has died, have a staff member who knows the students well participate in the intervention.
- Introduce yourself and explain the purpose of the meeting. Have the other provider introduce him/herself.
- If a student is highly emotional or needs to leave the classroom, assist him/her privately. Have a "safe room" or other setting in the school where students can go for respite or support.

## Core Action 2: Safety and Comfort

- Provide information about the event and attempt to dispel rumors and clarify any misunderstandings.
- Announce support services that the school and/or community are currently offering or will offer in the near future.
- Discuss the steps the district and/or school are taking to recover from the incident and answer any questions the students have.
- Address safety concerns and describe safety procedures that the school is implementing.
- Indicate how challenging a time it may be for some students.
- If a death has occurred, acknowledge that some individuals may be grieving and will express their grief in a variety of ways. Validate and facilitate the normal process of grieving, and inform students how to obtain continuing support and services.
- Discourage memorial displays within the classroom, as students may have very different reactions to them. Allow discussion on handling the deceased's belongings (e.g., artwork may go to a girl's parents; a boy's picture may remain up for a period of time).

## Core Action 3: Stabilization

- If a student needs stabilization, assist him/her individually.
- Have enough adults on hand to escort overwhelmed students to a quiet, private place outside the group setting, at which time a PFA-S provider can work to stabilize the student.
- Help students put words to their feelings and concerns. Answer any questions they have; help them to understand their own emotions and reduce their distress about their overwhelmed classmates.

## Core Action 4: Information Gathering

- Your ability to gather information is more limited in a classroom than in a small group or one-on-one setting.
- Remind students that you do not need in-depth descriptions of what happened but some basic information to address their current needs and concerns.
- Ask questions that encourage yes or no responses to help limit too much discussion.
- Redirect students who provide too many details of the event by reminding them of the purpose of this meeting.
- Keep the group focused on the task at hand, and do not allow one student or a small group of students to divert the conversation.

## Core Action 5: Practical Assistance

- Problem-solve and address students' practical needs, especially those related to academic and school functioning.
- Demonstrate how students can reach out to others so that their needs can be met.
- Tell students where they can find donated resources or services they need.
- Encourage the teacher to develop goals for the classroom and a way to chart the class's progress as they move forward. Help the students to see that they may have resources to share with others in the school community or that they could lend a helping hand.

### **Core Action 6: Connections with Social Supports**

- Discuss ways that students can help each other.
- Inform students of activities and recovery efforts for which they may volunteer.
- Stress the importance of mutual aid among the students. Brainstorm ways students can work together to help themselves and others.
- Urge students to alert a teacher, parent, or other adult when concerned about a peer. Help them to identify an adult who can be alerted and give them that adult's contact information.

### **Core Action 7: Information on Coping**

- Provide psychoeducation about the range of responses students might have in a crisis.
- Describe coping strategies that other students have found effective.
- Provide referrals for one-on-one services to those wishing more individualized attention.
- Encourage self-care practices and routines.
- Address potential problems related to sleep, mood, and academic functioning.
- Discuss the role of reminders and ways of managing them.
- Reestablish the learning environment by returning to the pre-event schedule and routine as much as possible.

### **Core Action 8: Linkages with Collaborative Services**

- Let students know the ways they can obtain individualized services.
- Connect students with appropriate support persons and relief or social assistance agencies.
- Finish the intervention with a discussion of constructive and/or prosocial activities that can promote recovery.
- Follow up with the teacher to monitor any significant emotional reactions the students may display after their participation in the group. Make appropriate referrals as needed.
- Encourage the teacher to schedule regular times to answer students' questions and to discuss recovery efforts.
- Select someone (possibly the co-leader) to follow up with students regarding any referrals or linkages with other services that you gave.

After conducting classroom interventions, always remember to take time for yourself. Be a good role-model, practice good self-care!



## PFA Guidelines for Small Groups: Students/Staff with Varied Experiences

You may use PFA-S with small groups to provide information, address safety issues, provide psychoeducation, enhance coping, encourage members of the group to support each other, and review services offered by the school and community. Groups may form spontaneously or you may group students (or staff) together, but individual members will have had vastly different experiences of the emergency (life threat, only media exposure, death of a close friend, etc.). Because the group members have had varying experiences, do not allow them to discuss their individual experiences in detail. Instead, focus on the purpose of the meeting, and encourage understanding and respect for the different experiences and reactions.

### Caution:

The small group format allows students (or staff) with varied experiences to support one another during this crisis phase and the recovery period to follow. Take precautions, however, to protect individuals with low levels of exposure from hearing others describe their traumatic experience in detail. Interrupt such discussions and refocus group members on learning ways to cope with their feelings and thoughts. Tell them to alert you or the co-leader if they begin to experience intense negative emotions. (Have an adult available to escort the person to a private area where s/he can recover). Likewise, let group members know how to get one-on-one support outside of the group if they want to talk more about their experiences.

Group students together who are close in age and at a similar maturity level. Whenever possible, meet with children in preschool and kindergarten in their own classroom with their teacher (in this case, use handout *PFA – Guidelines for Classroom Intervention*). Keep in mind that young children seek more physical comfort than older students, need frequent snack and restroom breaks, require more help with tasks, and need information presented to them in simple, concrete terms.

You can introduce and structure the group by saying something like:

“Members of this group had very different experiences during the event. Because of this and the limited time we have, we will not talk in detail about what happened to each of you. Instead, we’ll do what will be most helpful: update you about what has been happening, teach you practical ways to cope with the feelings you are having, and tell you about the support services that are available to help you during this difficult time.”

The following is a structure for conducting a small group of individuals with varied experiences. It's important to note that it is not necessary to implement all of the bulleted items in each core action, or even to implement all the core actions. Engage the students, observe what is being shared, and utilize different core actions to assist with their concerns.

### **Core Action 1: Contact and Engagement**

- Conduct the group with another provider, preferably someone familiar to the students/staff.
- Introduce yourself and the purpose of the meeting. Have the other provider introduce him/herself.
- Create a comforting presence in the room that encourages participation and acceptance of others' thoughts, emotions, and behavior.
- Have each of the members introduce him- or herself.
- Let group members know that if a student or staff member feels overwhelmed, the co-leader will help him/her individually.

### **Core Action 2: Safety and Comfort**

- Provide information about the event and the available services. Dispel rumors and clarify misunderstandings or misinformation.
- Address any safety concerns and identify any new safety procedures in place.
- Acknowledge that it is a hard time for everyone.
- Discuss the steps that the district and/or school are taking to recover from the incident, and answer any questions the group may have.
- Answer younger children's questions simply. Tell them only what they need to know.

### **Core Action 3: Stabilization**

- Meet individually with any student/staff needing stabilization.
- Have enough adults on hand to escort an overwhelmed student or staff member to a quiet, private place outside of the group, at which time, a PFA-S provider can stabilize him/her.
- Encourage the remaining individuals to talk about their feelings and concerns, so that they can understand and gain control of their emotions. Monitor the concerns and contain them if they go beyond what is helpful for the group.

### **Core Action 4: Information Gathering**

- If members of the group appear distressed, conduct a neutral group activity, such as a relaxation exercise.
- Use a screening form or ask specific (yes/no) questions to determine the group members' needs and concerns.
- Keep the group focused on the task, identifying needs and providing information.
- Redirect students who provide too many details of the event by reminding them of the purpose of the meeting.

### **Core Action 5: Practical Assistance**

- Problem-solve and address students' and staff members' practical needs.
- Suggest ways they can reach out to others to meet their needs.
- Tell them where they can find donated resources or services that they need.

### **Core Action 6: Connections with Social Supports**

- Discuss ways that group members can help each other.
- Inform them of activities and recovery efforts for which they may volunteer.
- Stress the importance of mutual aid among the members. Brainstorm ways that they can work together to help themselves and others.
- Identify resources available if they start feeling overwhelmed when supporting their peers.
- Help identify an adult that they can alert if they become concerned about another peer.

### **Core Action 7: Information on Coping**

- Provide psychoeducation about the range of responses students/staff can have in a crisis.
- Describe coping strategies that other people have found effective.
- Encourage self-care practices and routines.
- Address potential concerns related to sleep, mood, and academic functioning.
- Discuss the role of reminders and ways to manage them.

### **Core Action 8: Linkages with Collaborative Services**

- Remind students/staff that they may feel better after the group, but that some of their difficult feelings (such as sadness, worry) may return and that they should practice good self-care.
- Identify ways to access more individualized services.
- Connect members to appropriate support persons and relief or social assistance agencies.
- Check with teachers following the group session to monitor students who display significant emotional reactions after group. Make appropriate referrals.
- Follow up (or have the co-leader do so) with students/staff regarding referrals you gave.
- Delineate the resources and expertise available within the school community.
- End the intervention with a discussion of constructive and/or prosocial activities that can promote recovery, including ways members can support each other.

After conducting the group intervention, always remember to take time for yourself. Be a good role-model practice good self-care!



## PFA Guidelines for Small Groups: Students/Staff with Similar Experiences

You may use PFA-S with small groups of students/staff to provide information, address safety issues, provide psychoeducation, enhance coping, encourage members of the group to support each other, and review services offered by the school and the community. When the groups are comprised of students or staff who have had similar traumatic experiences, you can tailor the intervention to address the common experiences that they share (e.g., all are friends of a student who committed suicide or all suffered injuries when a building collapsed).

The small group format allows students/staff members who have shared traumatic experiences to support each other and to feel less isolated. The group also provides a forum to discuss reactions to the event. Although students/staff members may have been similarly exposed, their responses may vary greatly depending on their personal characteristics and previous experiences. Thus, this group is not an appropriate forum for disclosing in depth or for discussing vivid details. Keeping the students/staff members on task may become challenging as individuals start to share the specifics of the event and their emotions heighten. Focus the group on learning practical ways to help themselves and each other cope.

Group students together who are close in age and at a similar maturity level. Whenever possible, meet with children in preschool and kindergarten in their own classroom with their teacher (in this case, use *handout PFA – Guidelines for Classroom Intervention*). Keep in mind that young children seek more physical comfort than older students, need frequent snack and restroom breaks, require more help with tasks, and need information presented to them in simple, concrete terms.

A shared-experience group may require more careful planning to keep individuals from feeling overwhelmed. You might (1) plan your agenda, including defining your responsibilities and those of your co-leader; (2) think through specific language to use to refocus group members as needed; (3) select a relaxation skill to teach—such as a breathing exercise—to calm and refocus the group, and (4) locate a nearby “break area.” Agree to facilitate these groups ONLY if you have time to plan, are not currently feeling overwhelmed yourself, and have a support system or coping plan to help you manage the difficult emotions that often arise after leading such a group. If you have not led groups, try to co-lead with someone who is experienced.

Introduce the group by explaining its purpose:

“We are going to find helpful ways to cope with the terrible thing that has happened and to help each other solve the immediate problems you face. You may want to talk about what happened to you—what you saw, heard, and felt. Right now, however, what will help you the most is to learn how to deal with the intense feelings and thoughts, rather than dwell on them. Today we want each of you to leave the group with some specific tools to help you cope with these intense feelings and thoughts. Also, we will update you about what has been happening and what support services are available. By the way, it is common for people in a group like this to feel emotional or need to take a break. If this happens to you, just signal a group leader, and one of us will show you where to go. You can come back to the group when you’re ready.”

The following is a structure for conducting a small group with shared experiences. It's important to note that it is not necessary to implement all of the bulleted items in each core action, or even to implement all the core actions. Engage the students, observe what is being shared, and utilize different core actions to assist with their concerns.

### Core Action 1: Contact and Engagement

- Conduct the group with another provider, preferably someone who is familiar to the students/staff.
- Introduce yourself and the purpose of the meeting.
- Acknowledge to group members that, while they have had similar experiences, their responses may be very different.
- Create a comforting presence in the room that encourages participation and acceptance of others' thoughts, feelings, and behavior.
- Have each of the members introduce him- or herself.
- In a group where all the members are grieving or have had a life-threatening event, expect some individuals to express intense negative reactions. To make sure that group members do not become too overwhelmed, set parameters at the beginning by describing how you will handle these situations (i.e., if someone feels overwhelmed, there's a place he/she can go to take a break; if the discussion gets side-tracked, you will refocus the group; if a student or staff member needs individual support, the co-leader will provide that).
- Maintain a calm and comforting presence at all times. Young children, in particular, are keenly aware of adults' stress or fear.

### Core Action 2: Safety and Comfort

- Provide information about the event and the available services. Dispel rumors and clarify any misunderstanding or misinformation in an age-appropriate manner.
- Address safety concerns and identify what safety procedures are being implemented.
- Acknowledge that it is a hard time for everyone.
- Discuss the steps the district and/or school are taking to recover from the incident and answer any questions the group may have.
- Answer younger children's questions simply. Tell them only what they need to know.
- If a death has occurred, acknowledge that some individuals are grieving and that they will express that grief in a variety of ways. Validate and facilitate the normal process of grieving and tell group members how to access continuing support and services.
- Acknowledge if group members have specific concerns that are not shared by others (e.g., part of criminal proceedings, medical treatment needs, grieving best friend).

### Core Action 3: Stabilization

- If a student/staff member needs stabilization, see him/her individually.
- If many group members are upset, have them do a neutral activity such as a relaxation exercise.
- Have enough adults on hand to escort an overwhelmed student or staff member to a quiet, private place outside of the group setting, at which time a PFA-S provider can stabilize him/her.
- Encourage the remaining individuals to talk about their feelings and concerns, so that they can understand and gain control of their emotions.

### Core Action 4: Information Gathering

- Facilitate a discussion to determine the group members' needs and concerns.
- Redirect students who provide too many details of the event by reminding them of the purpose of the meeting. Though this is not the setting to discuss individual's unique experiences in detail, working with small groups with similar experiences decreases the likelihood that they will be exposed to details of the event with which they were not previously familiar.

### Core Action 5: Practical Assistance

- Problem-solve and address students' and staff members' practical needs.
- Suggest ways they can reach out to others to have their needs met.
- Tell them where they can find donated resources or services that they need.
- Address the unique needs of the group (e.g., discuss the medical issues of students with serious injuries or provide resources for students/staff members whose homes were destroyed).

### Core Action 6: Connections with Social Supports

- Discuss ways that group members can help each other.
- Inform them of activities and recovery efforts for which they may volunteer.
- Stress the importance of mutual aid among the members. Brainstorm ways that they can work together to help themselves and others.
- Identify resources available if they start to feel overwhelmed when supporting their peers.
- Help identify an adult to alert if an individual becomes concerned about another peer.

### Core Action 7: Information on Coping

- Provide psychoeducation about the range of responses students can have in a crisis.
- Describe coping strategies that others have found effective.
- Encourage self-care practices and routines.
- Address potential problems related to sleep, mood, and academic functioning.
- Discuss the role of reminders and ways to manage them.

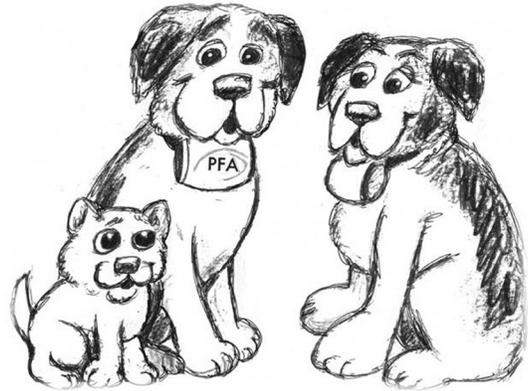
### Core Action 8: Linkages with Collaborative Services

- Remind students/staff that they may feel better after the group, but that some of their difficult feelings (such as sadness, worry) may return and to practice good self-care.
- Identify ways that they can get more individualized services.
- Connect members to appropriate support persons and relief or social assistance agencies.
- Follow up with teachers after group to monitor students who displayed significant emotional reactions. Make appropriate referrals as needed.
- Follow up (or have the co-leader do so) with students/staff regarding referrals you gave them.
- End the intervention with a discussion of constructive and/or prosocial activities that can promote recovery, including ways members can support each other.

Always remember to take time for yourself. Be a good role-model practice good self-care!



# Appendix C: Handouts and Worksheets



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## Provider Worksheet

### Survivor Current Needs

Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Provider: \_\_\_\_\_

Survivor Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Location: \_\_\_\_\_

This session was conducted with (check all that apply):

Child       Adolescent       Adult       Family       Group

Provider: Use this form to document what the survivor needs most at this time. This form can be used to communicate with referral agencies to help promote continuity of care.

#### 1. Check the boxes corresponding to difficulties the survivor is experiencing.

Behavioral	Emotional	Physical	Cognitive
<input type="checkbox"/> Disorientation	<input type="checkbox"/> Acute stress reactions	<input type="checkbox"/> Headaches	<input type="checkbox"/> Inability to accept/cope with death of loved one(s)
<input type="checkbox"/> Increased drug, alcohol, or prescription drug use	<input type="checkbox"/> Acute grief reactions	<input type="checkbox"/> Stomachaches	<input type="checkbox"/> Distressing dreams or nightmares
<input type="checkbox"/> Isolation/withdrawal	<input type="checkbox"/> Sadness, tearfulness	<input type="checkbox"/> Sleep difficulties	<input type="checkbox"/> Intrusive thoughts or images
<input type="checkbox"/> High-risk behavior	<input type="checkbox"/> Irritability, anger	<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty eating	<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty concentrating
<input type="checkbox"/> Regressive behavior	<input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety, fear	<input type="checkbox"/> Worsening of health conditions	<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty remembering
<input type="checkbox"/> Separation anxiety	<input type="checkbox"/> Despair, hopelessness	<input type="checkbox"/> Fatigue/exhaustion	<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulty making decisions
<input type="checkbox"/> Violent behavior	<input type="checkbox"/> Guilt or shame	<input type="checkbox"/> Chronic agitation	<input type="checkbox"/> Preoccupation with death/destruction
<input type="checkbox"/> Maladaptive coping	<input type="checkbox"/> Feeling emotionally numb, disconnected	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Difficulties completing assignments or chores
<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____	<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____		<input type="checkbox"/> Other _____

#### 2. Check the boxes corresponding to other specific concerns.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Past or preexisting trauma/psychological problems/substance abuse problems | <input type="checkbox"/> Living arrangements                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Injured as a result of the emergency                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Lost job or school                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> At risk of losing life during the emergency                                | <input type="checkbox"/> Financial problems                            |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Loved one(s) missing or dead   | <input type="checkbox"/> Physical/emotional disability                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Displaced from home  | <input type="checkbox"/> Medication stabilization                      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assisted with rescue/recovery  | <input type="checkbox"/> Concerns about child/adolescent (for parent)  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pets missing/injured/dead  | <input type="checkbox"/> Separation from primary caregiver (for child) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other _____  |  |

**3. Please make note of any other information that might be helpful in making a referral.**

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**4. Referral**

- Within school (specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- Community response agencies
- Professional mental health services
- Other \_\_\_\_\_
- Substance abuse treatment
- Other community services
- Medical treatment

**5. Was the referral accepted by the individual?**    Yes                       No

## PFA-S Provider Care

Providing support in the immediate aftermath of crisis can be an enriching professional and personal experience that enhances satisfaction through helping others. It can also be physically and emotionally exhausting. The following provides information to consider when responding to an emergency at a school.

### Common Stress Reactions

You may experience a number of stress responses, which are considered common when working with survivors:

- Increase or decrease in activity level
- Difficulties sleeping
- Substance use
- Disconnection and numbing
- Irritability, anger, and frustration
- Vicarious traumatization in the form of shock, fearfulness, horror, helplessness
- Confusion, lack of attention, and difficulty making decisions
- Physical reactions (headaches, stomachaches, easily startled)
- Depressive or anxiety reactions
- Decreased social activities
- Diminished self-care

### Extreme Stress Reactions

You may experience more serious stress responses that warrant seeking professional support or monitoring by a supervisor. These include:

Sense of helplessness

Preoccupation or compulsive re-experiencing of trauma experienced either directly or indirectly

Attempts to over-control in professional or personal situations, or act out a “rescuer complex”

Social withdrawal and isolation

Chronic exhaustion

Survival coping strategies like relying on substances, overly preoccupied by work, or drastic changes in sleeping or eating patterns

Serious difficulties in interpersonal relationships, including domestic violence

Depression accompanied by hopelessness

Suicidal ideation or attempts

Unnecessary risk-taking

Illness or an increase in levels of pain

Changes in memory and perception

Disruption in your perceptions of safety, trust, and independence

School administration and leadership can help support providers by reducing the risk of extreme stress through implementing procedures and policies. Consider:

- Encouraging work breaks
- Rotating of providers from the most highly exposed assignments to lesser levels of exposure
- Identifying enough supports to meet the needs of administration, staff, students, and families
- Encouraging peer partners and peer consultation
- Monitoring providers who meet certain high risk criteria, such as: those who have been directly exposed to the event, those having regular exposure to severely affected individuals or families, those with multiple stresses (e.g., family changes, health problems)
- Ensuring regular supervision, case conferencing, staff appreciation events
- Conducting trainings on stress management practices and encourage the use of such practices
- Supporting open communication

## Self-Care

Self-care is the ability to engage in helping others without sacrificing other important parts of one's life. It's taking responsibility for job functions you have control over, the ability to maintain a positive attitude towards the work despite challenges, and your right to be well, safe, and fulfilled.

It's important to remember that self-care is not an emergency response plan to be activated when stress becomes overwhelming or that having a good self-care plan means you are acting selfishly. Healthy self-care can renew our spirits and help us become more resilient.

Think of self-care as having three basic aspects:

Awareness	The first step is to seek awareness. This requires you to slow down and focus inwardly to determine how you are feeling, what your stress level is, what types of thoughts are going through your head, and whether your behaviors and actions are consistent with the who you want to be.
Balance	The second step is to seek balance in all areas of your life including work, personal and family life, rest, and leisure. You will be more productive when you've had opportunities to rest and relax. Becoming aware of when you are losing balance in your life gives you an opportunity to change.
Connection	The final step is connection. It involves building connections and supportive relationships with your co-workers, friends, family, and community. One of the most powerful stress reducers is social connection.

## Self-Care Checklist

There are several ways you can find balance, be aware of your needs, and make connections. Use this list to help you decide which self-care strategies will work for you.

### Make every effort to:

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seek out and give social support  | <input type="checkbox"/> Access supervision routinely to share concerns, identify difficult experiences and strategize to solve problems |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Check in with other colleagues to discuss the response to the emergency                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Anticipate that you will experience recurring thoughts or dreams, and that they will decrease over time         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Schedule time for a vacation or gradual reintegration into your normal life               | <input type="checkbox"/> Keep a journal to get worries off your mind   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare for worldview changes that may not be mirrored by others in your life             | <input type="checkbox"/> Ask for help in parenting, if you feel irritable or are having difficulties adjusting back to your routine      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Participate in formal help if extreme stress persists for greater than two to three weeks | <input type="checkbox"/> Plan for family/home safety, including making child care and pet care plans                                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Increase leisure activities, stress management, and exercise                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Practice brief relaxation techniques during the workday   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pay extra attention to health and nutrition   | <input type="checkbox"/> Use a buddy system to share upsetting emotional responses   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self-monitor and pace your efforts  | <input type="checkbox"/> Stay aware of limitations and needs   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Maintain boundaries: delegate, say “no,” and avoid getting overloaded with work           | <input type="checkbox"/> Recognize when one is Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired (HALT), and take the appropriate self-care measures        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pay extra attention to rekindling close interpersonal relationships                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Increase activities that are positive   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Practice good sleep routines  | <input type="checkbox"/> Practice religious faith, philosophy, spirituality  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Make time for self-reflection   | <input type="checkbox"/> Spend time with family and friends  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Find things that you enjoy or make you laugh  | <input type="checkbox"/> Learn how to “put stress away”  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Try at times not to be in charge or the “expert”  | <input type="checkbox"/> Write, draw, paint  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Increase experiences that have spiritual or philosophical meaning to you                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Limit caffeine, cigarettes, and substance use   |

Be careful of engaging in activities that can hinder your attempts at good self-care. Avoid:

- Extended periods of solo work without colleagues or working “round the clock” with few breaks
- Negative self-talk that reinforces feelings of inadequacy or incompetency
- Common attitudinal obstacles to self-care (e.g., “It would be selfish to take time to rest.”)
- Negatively assessing your contribution
- Use of excessive use of alcohol, illicit drugs, or excessive amounts of prescription drugs



## Connecting with Others: For Adults

### SEEKING SOCIAL SUPPORT

- Making contact with others can help reduce feelings of distress
- Adults can benefit from spending time with other similar-age peers
- Adults need the support of familiar adults to cope with traumatic events
- Support can come from family, friends, teachers, or others coping with the same traumatic event

#### Social Support Options

- |  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Spouse or partner</li> <li>• Trusted family member</li> <li>• Close friend</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clergy</li> <li>• Doctor or nurse</li> <li>• Counselor</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support group</li> <li>• Co-worker/Teacher</li> <li>• Pet</li> </ul> |
|--|--|---|

#### Do . . .

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|--|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Decide carefully whom to talk to</li> <li>✓ Decide ahead of time what you want to discuss</li> <li>✓ Choose the right time and place</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Start by talking about practical things</li> <li>✓ Let others know you need to talk or just to be with them</li> <li>✓ Talk about painful thoughts and feelings when you're ready</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Ask others if it's a good time to talk</li> <li>✓ Tell others you appreciate their listening</li> <li>✓ Tell others what you need or how they can help—name one main thing that would help you right now</li> </ul> |
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#### Don't . . .

- |   |   |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Keep quiet because you don't want to upset others</li> <li>✗ Keep quiet because you're worried about being a burden</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✗ Start by talking about practical things</li> <li>✗ Let others know you need to talk or just to be with them</li> </ul> |
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#### Ways to Get Connected

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Call friends or family on the phone</li> <li>• Increase contact with the acquaintances and friends you have now</li> <li>• Renew or begin involvement with a church, synagogue, mosque, temple, or other group</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get involved with a support group</li> <li>• Get involved in community recovery activities</li> </ul> |
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## Connecting with Others: For Adults

### GIVING SOCIAL SUPPORT

You can help family members and friends cope with the emergency by spending time with them and listening carefully. You may also feel better yourself when you give support to others. Most people recover best when they feel connected to people who care about them. Some people choose not to talk about their experiences very much, while others do need to discuss their experiences. For some, talking about what happened can help those events seem less overwhelming. For others, just spending quiet time with people who are close and accepting can feel best. Here is some information about giving social support to other people.

#### Reasons Why People May Avoid Social Support

- Not knowing what they need
- Feeling embarrassed or “weak”
- Feeling they will lose control
- Not wanting to burden others
- Doubting it will be helpful or thinking that others won’t understand
- Having tried unsuccessfully to get help in the past
- Wanting to avoid thinking or feeling about the event
- Feeling that others will be disappointed or judgmental
- Not knowing where to get help

#### Good Things to Do When Giving Support

- Show interest, attention, and that you care
- Find a time and place to talk without interruption
- Have no expectations; don’t judge
- Show respect for the person’s reactions and ways of coping
- Acknowledge that this type of stress can take time to resolve
- Help brainstorm positive ways to deal with his/her reactions
- Talk about expected reactions to traumatic events and healthy coping
- Express belief that the person is capable of recovery
- Offer to talk or spend time together as many times as is needed

#### Things That Interfere with Giving Support

- Rushing to tell someone that he/she will be okay or that he/she should just “get over it”
- Discussing your personal experiences without listening to the other person’s story
- Stopping the person from talking about what is bothering him/her
- Acting like someone is weak or exaggerating, because he/she isn’t coping as well as you are
- Giving advice without listening to the person’s concerns or asking what works for him/her
- Telling the person he/she was lucky it wasn’t worse

#### Ways to Get Connected

- Let the person know that experts think persistent avoidance and withdrawal are likely to increase distress, while social support helps recovery
- Encourage the person to join a support group with others who have had similar experiences
- Encourage the person to talk with a counselor, clergy, or medical professional, and offer to accompany him/her
- Enlist help from others in your social circle, so that you all take part in supporting the person

## Connecting with Others: For Students

- Talking or hanging out with other people can help you feel better.
- It is important to get support from both adults (family members and teachers) and peers your age (friends and classmates).
- It may help to spend time with other people who have been through similar experiences.

### Those who can support you include:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family who live with you</li> <li>• Extended family members who don't live with you</li> <li>• Adults at school (teachers, coaches, aides, administrators)</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close friends/boyfriends/girlfriends</li> <li>• Classmates or others your age who have had experiences like yours</li> <li>• School counselors or other counselors</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Religious leaders</li> <li>• Doctors or nurses</li> <li>• Pets</li> </ul> |
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### When you want to talk to someone:

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Decide carefully whom to talk to by thinking about a person you trust, who listens to you, and who can help you.</li> <li>✓ Choose the right time and place to talk.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ For example, a teacher may not be able to talk to you while she is teaching class, but may be happy to talk to you after class.</li> <li>✓ Ask the person if it's a good time to talk.</li> <li>✓ Let the person know that you want to talk.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ If you don't feel like talking, tell the person that you just want to spend time with them.</li> <li>✓ Start by telling the person what you need.</li> <li>✓ If you feel ready, you may talk about sad or scary thoughts or feelings, but you don't have to talk about anything if you don't want to.</li> </ul> |
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### Sometimes students don't want to talk about what happened because they worry that:

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Other people won't want to listen or don't have time to listen.</li> <li>• Other people will be upset if they hear about what happened.</li> <li>• Adults will be mad if you talk about bad things that happened.</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They will look like they are weak or scared if they ask for help.</li> <li>• If they let themselves feel sad or scared, they will never feel better.             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– For example, some people are scared that if they start crying, they won't stop. This is not true; it actually helps to talk, as long as you wait until you are ready.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
|---|---|

**Do not let your worries stop you from talking to family and friends. They want to be there for you, and you will feel better if you spend time with them.**

**What to do:**

- ✓ Tell a family member or friend that you would like to talk about what happened and your feelings about it.
- ✓ Tell family members or friends if you don't feel like talking about what happened, but want to spend time and do fun things with them.
- ✓ Remember that after something bad happens, it is ok to have many different feelings.
- ✓ Know that it is ok to spend time with people and to have fun, even during a sad time.
- ✓ Reach out to friends or family members by phone or internet.
- ✓ Get involved in support groups and community, school, or religious activities (sports, volunteering, youth groups).
- ✓ Support others; sometimes it will help you feel better, too.

**Good things to do when giving support to other people:**

- Let people know that you are interested in how they are feeling.
- Understand that people have all different kinds of feelings after a traumatic event. There is no right or wrong way to react. Some people cry when they are sad; other people may feel sad, but respond by being quiet, laughing, or seeming angry.
- Listen to the other person, respect his/her feelings, never make fun of the person, and encourage friends to seek support from adults when you think it might help. It always helps to be a good friend.

## When Terrible Things Happen: For Adults

### Immediate Reactions

There are a wide variety of positive and negative reactions that survivors can experience during and immediately after an emergency. These include:

Domain	Negative Responses	Positive Responses
<b>Cognitive</b>	Confusion, disorientation, worry, intrusive thoughts and images, self-blame	Determination and resolve, sharper perception, courage, optimism, faith
<b>Emotional</b>	Shock, sorrow, grief, sadness, fear, anger, numbness, irritability, guilt, and shame	Feeling involved, challenged, mobilized
<b>Social</b>	Extreme withdrawal, interpersonal conflict	Social connectedness, altruistic helping behaviors
<b>Physiological</b>	Fatigue, headache, muscle tension, stomachache, increased heart rate, exaggerated startle response, difficulties sleeping	Alertness, readiness to respond, increased energy

### Common Negative Reactions That May Continue

#### *Intrusive reactions*

- Distressing thoughts or images of the event while awake or dreaming
- Upsetting emotional or physical reactions to reminders of the experience
- Feeling as if the experience is happening all over again (“flashbacks”)

#### *Avoidance and withdrawal reactions*

- Avoiding talking, thinking, or having feelings about the traumatic event
- Avoiding reminders of the event (places and people connected to what happened)
- Restricted emotions, feeling numb
- Feelings of detachment and estrangement from others, social withdrawal
- Loss of interest in usually pleasurable activities

***Physical arousal reactions***

- Constantly being “on the lookout” for danger, startling easily, or being jumpy
- Irritability or outbursts of anger, feeling “on edge”
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep, problems concentrating or paying attention

***Reactions to trauma and loss reminders***

- Reactions to places, people, sights, sounds, smells, and feelings that are reminders of the traumatic event
  - Reminders can bring on distressing mental images, thoughts, and emotional/physical reactions
  - Common examples include sudden loud noises, sirens, locations where the event occurred, seeing people with disabilities, funerals, anniversaries of the event, birthday of the deceased, and media reports about the event or its aftermath

***Positive changes in priorities, worldview, and expectations***

- Enhanced appreciation that family and friends are precious and important
- Meeting the challenge of addressing difficulties (by taking positive action steps, changing the focus of thoughts, using humor, acceptance)
- Shifting expectations about what to expect from day to day and about what is considered a “good day”
- Shifting priorities to focus more on quality time with family or friends
- Increased commitment to self, family, friends, and spiritual/religious faith

***Common Reactions When a Loved One Dies***

- Confusion, numbness, disbelief, bewilderment, feeling lost
- Feeling angry at the person who died or at people considered responsible for the death
- Strong physical reactions, such as nausea, fatigue, shakiness, and muscle weakness
- Feeling guilty for still being alive
- Intense emotions, such as extreme sadness, anger, or fear
- Increased risk for physical illness and injury
- Decreased productivity or difficulty making decisions
- Having thoughts about the person who died, even when you don’t want to
- Longing for, missing, and wanting to search for the person who died
- Worry that they themselves or another loved one might die
- Anxiety when separated from caregivers or other loved ones
- Heightened sense of the role of spirituality and/or religion

## What Doesn't Help

- ✗ Doing risky things (driving recklessly, substance abuse, not taking adequate precautions)
- ✗ Overeating or not eating
- ✗ Not taking care of yourself
- ✗ Extreme withdrawal from family or friends
- ✗ Extreme avoidance of thinking or talking about the event or the death of a loved one
- ✗ Working too much
- ✗ Using alcohol or drugs to cope
- ✗ Excessive watching television or spending time on the internet
- ✗ Withdrawing from pleasant activities
- ✗ Violence or conflict
- ✗ Blaming others

## What Helps

- ✓ Seeking a community religious professional
- ✓ Positive reminiscing about a loved one who has died
- ✓ Seeking counseling
- ✓ Taking breaks
- ✓ Keeping a journal
- ✓ Exercising in moderation
- ✓ Trying to maintain a normal schedule
- ✓ Participating in a support group
- ✓ Getting adequate rest and eating healthy meals
- ✓ Using relaxation methods (breathing exercises, meditation, calming self-talk, soothing music)
- ✓ Scheduling and engaging in positive activities (sports, hobbies, reading)
- ✓ Focusing on something practical to do right now to manage the situation
- ✓ Talking to another person to get support or spending time with others



## When Terrible Things Happen: For Students

When a bad thing happens, people have many different kinds of thoughts and feelings. There is no right or wrong way to feel. Some of the ways we respond may be helpful like how being around family and friends can help us feel happy or safe, while some of the ways we respond can make us feel very sad, scared, or angry.

### **A crisis can affect how you feel, how you think, and how you act.**

You may feel confused, worried, shocked, sad, scared, angry, guilty, or numb. Maybe even scared about things that you weren't scared of before, such as being alone, being in the dark, or getting hurt.

You may have feelings in your bodies, such as:

- Being tired
- Headaches or stomachaches
- A fast heart beat
- Feeling jumpy
- Having problems sleeping

You may have thoughts, such as:

- Believing that what happened was your fault
- Images of the bad thing repeatedly popping into your head
- Nightmares
- Worrying that bad things will happen again

You may act differently:

- You may not want to be around family or friends
- You may get into more fights
- You may have a hard time concentrating or getting schoolwork done
- You may not want to talk about, think about, or have any feelings about the bad thing that happened
- You may not have as much fun as you used to
- You may not want to be around things that remind you of what happened

Many of these thoughts, feelings, and behaviors may occur when your reminded of the bad thing that happened. Reminders may include places, people, sights, sounds, smells, and feelings related to the event.

**What does NOT help when you are affected by a crisis:**

- X Staying away from fun activities
- X Fighting
- X Avoiding thinking about what happened
- X Staying away from family and friends
- X Avoiding asking for help when you need it
- X Using drugs or alcohol
- X Taking risks, such as climbing too high, being careless crossing the street, or driving recklessly

**What helps when you are affected by a crisis:**

- ✓ Talking to and spending time with family and friends
- ✓ Doing fun things with family and friends
- ✓ Eating well, getting enough sleep, and exercising
- ✓ Getting back to a regular schedule—doing things that you would usually do
- ✓ Playing outside
- ✓ Listening to music
- ✓ Keeping a journal
- ✓ Giving yourself extra time to do homework
- ✓ Accepting that you may need extra help temporarily and being willing to ask others for support

It is okay to feel sad or scared after a bad thing happens, but if these feelings get in the way of getting along with family or friends or schoolwork, talk to an adult about your feelings.

# Helping Your Family Cope: For Parents

## Reestablish Family Routines

Reestablish family routines to the extent possible after an emergency. Try to maintain routines such as meal times, bedtime, reading time, and playtime, and to set aside time for the family to enjoy activities together.

## Develop Tolerance among Family Members

Assist family members in developing a mutual understanding of their different experiences, reactions, and course of recovery. Encourage family members to be understanding, patient, and tolerant of differences in their reactions to the event, and to talk about things that are bothering them, so that the others will know when and how to support them.

### Family members can help each other by:

- Listening and trying to understand
- Comforting with a hug
- Doing something thoughtful like writing a note
- Getting the child's mind off the event by playing a game

*Even though family members have gone through the same crisis, they may have very different feelings and reactions to it. These differences can lead to misunderstandings, arguments, and an inability to support each other well.*

Pay special attention to your children's behavior. Out of control or unusual behavior could mean that your children are troubled by reminders and hardships from the event. For example, children may look as if they are having a temper tantrum, when actually they are acting out because they have been reminded that a friend was hurt or killed.

## Give Special Attention to Adolescents

Adolescents may find that you are more anxious about their safety and, consequently, more restrictive in what you allow your teens to do, after the family has faced a crisis. Help adolescents to understand that this increase in your protective behaviors is common and usually temporary. Knowing that the "strictness" will not last forever will help teenagers avoid unnecessary conflict as the family recovers.

### Common Caregiver Reactions:

- Setting earlier curfews
- Limiting adolescents from going off by themselves without adult supervision
- Insisting that teens call in frequently to let you know that they are safe
- Restricting "everyday" risks (driving a car or doing skateboarding tricks) even if you formerly permitted it

*Parents worry more about their kids' safety after a crisis, so they often have more restrictions. Remind teens to cut you some slack. This increase in supervision is usually only temporary, and will probably drop off as things start to settle down.*



## Tips for Relaxation

Tension and anxiety are common feelings after crises. These feelings can make it more difficult to cope with the many things that must be done to recover. Using relaxation exercises to calm yourself during the day may make it easier to sleep, concentrate, and have energy for coping with life. These exercises can include slow breathing, meditation, swimming, stretching, yoga, prayer, listening to quiet music, spending time outdoors. Here are breathing exercises that may help:

<b>Adults and Teens</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Inhale slowly (one-thousand one, one-thousand two, one-thousand three) through your nose or mouth, and comfortably fill your lungs.</li> <li>2. Silently and gently say to yourself, "I'm filling my body with calm."</li> <li>3. Exhale slowly (one-thousand one, one-thousand two, one-thousand three) through your mouth, and comfortably empty your lungs.</li> <li>4. Silently and gently say to yourself, "I'm letting the tension drain away."</li> <li>5. Repeat five times slowly.</li> </ol>
<b>Children (practice with your child)</b>	<p>Let's practice a different way of breathing that can help calm our bodies down.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I want each of you to think about your favorite color. Okay, we are going to breathe in through our noses or mouths. When we breathe in, we are going to think about our favorite color and the beautiful things you connect with that color.</li> <li>2. Next, we will breathe out through our mouths. When we breathe out, we are going to breathe out the gray and the uncomfortable feelings that have been building up. Let out the air, slowly and quietly.</li> <li>3. Let's try it together. Breathe in really slowly and inhale thinking about your favorite color and the beautiful things connected to this color, while I count to three. One, two, three. Good job. Now, while I count again, slowly let the air out while thinking about the color gray and all the unpleasant feelings. One, two, three. Great job. Let's try it together again. [Remember to praise children for their efforts.]</li> </ol>

### Tips for Families:

- Find a room where everyone can spread out and have his/her own space.
- Some family members will want to lie down, others will want to sit. Some will want to close their eyes, and some will want to keep them open. Encourage everyone to find a way that feels most comfortable to them.
- Take time to practice this when everyone is calm. That way, everyone will be better able to use the breathing exercise when they are feeling upset.
- For young children, turn the breathing exercise into a game. Blow soap bubbles with a wand or blow cotton balls across a tabletop. Get creative and make it fun.

