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PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID FOR REFUGEES AND INTERNALLY DISPLACED PERSONS IN IRAQ GUIDE FOR FIELD WORKERS

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PRIMARY HEALTH
CARE PROJECT



Psychological First Aid for Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons in Iraq Guide for Field Workers



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Contents

Foreward	5
Chapter 1: Understanding Psychological First Aid (PFA).....	6
.1 How do crisis events affect people?.....	6
2. What is PFA?.....	7
3. PFA: Who, when and where?	8
4. Who is PFA for?	8
5. When is PFA provided?.....	9
6. Where is PFA provided?	10
7. Who Delivers Psychological First Aid?.....	10
8. Strengths of Psychological First Aid.....	10
9. Basic Objectives of Psychological First Aid	11
10. Delivering Psychological First Aid	11
Chapter 2: How to help responsibly	12
1. Respect safety, dignity and rights	12
.2 Adapt what you do to take account of the person’s culture	13
.3 Be aware of other emergency response measures.....	15
4. Look after yourself.....	16
Chapter 3: Providing Psychological First Aid (PFA).....	17
1. Good communication	17
2. Prepare – learn about the situation	19
3. Action principles of PFA – look, listen and link.....	21
Annex 1: Case scenario for violence and displacement	33

Foreward

When terrible things happen in our communities, countries and the world, we want to reach out a helping hand to those who are affected. This guide covers psychological first aid that involves humane, supportive and practical help to fellow human beings suffering serious crisis events. It is written for people in a position to help others who have experienced an extremely distressing event. It gives a framework for supporting people in ways that respect their dignity, culture and abilities. Despite its name, psychological first aid covers both social and psychological support.

The United Nations defined Internal Displacement as: “compulsory navigation due to internal conflicts forcing persons and families to leave their original places of residency and going to other places offering for them a greater amount of security and stability.”

This guide was prepared by USAID/Primary Health Care Project (PHCPI) as an effort to assist Ministry of Health (MoH) to address health needs of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in order to have widely agreed upon psychological first aid materials for use in Iraq in which people leave their homes due to wars and internal conflicts, i.e. persons which were forced to escape to save their life.

Perhaps you are called upon as a staff member or volunteer to help in a major disaster, or you find yourself at the scene of an accident where people are hurt. Perhaps you are a teacher or health worker talking with someone from your community who has just witnessed the violent death of a loved one. This guide will help you to know the most supportive things to say and do for people who are very distressed. It also gives information on how to approach a new situation safely and not cause harm.

Chapter 1: Understanding Psychological First Aid (PFA)

1. How do crisis events affect people?



Different kinds of distressing events happen in the world. Individuals, families or entire communities may be affected. People may lose their homes or loved ones, be separated from family and community, or may witness violence, destruction or death.

Although everyone is affected in some way by these events, there are a wide range of reactions and feelings each person can have. Many people may feel overwhelmed, confused or very uncertain about what is happening. They can feel very fearful or anxious, or numb and detached. Some people may have mild reactions, whereas others may have more severe reactions. How someone reacts depends on many factors, including:

- the nature and severity of the event(s) they experience;
- their experience with previous distressing events;
- the support they have in their life from others;
- their physical health;
- their personal and family history of mental health problems;
- their cultural background and traditions;
- Their age (for example, children of different age groups react differently).

Every person has strengths and abilities to help them cope with life challenges. However, some people are particularly vulnerable in a crisis situation and may need extra help. This includes people who may be at risk or need additional support because of their age (children, elderly), because they have a mental or

physical disability, or because they belong to groups who may be marginalized or targeted for violence.

2. What is PFA?

Psychological first aid (PFA) describes a humane, supportive response to a fellow human being who is suffering and who may need support. PFA involves the following themes:

- providing practical care and support, which does not intrude;
- assessing needs and concerns;
- helping people to address basic needs (for example, food and water, information);
- listening to people, but not pressuring them to talk;
- comforting people and helping them to feel calm;
- helping people connect to information, services and social supports;
- Protecting people from further harm.

It is also important to understand what PFA is not:

- It is not something that only professionals can do.
- It is not professional counselling.
- It is not “psychological debriefing”¹ in that PFA does not necessarily involve a detailed discussion of the event that caused the distress.
- It is not asking someone to analyse what happened to them or to put time and events in order.
- Although PFA involves being available to listen to people’s stories, it is not about pressuring people to tell you their feelings and reactions to an event.

PFA is an alternative to “psychological debriefing” which has been found to be ineffective. In contrast, PFA involves factors that seem to be most helpful to people’s long-term recovery (according to various studies and the consensus of many crisis helpers²). These include:

- feeling safe, connected to others, calm and hopeful;
- having access to social, physical and emotional support; and
- feeling able to help themselves, as individuals and communities.

3. PFA: Who, when and where?



4. Who is PFA for?

PFA is for distressed people who have been recently exposed to a serious crisis event. You can provide help to both children and adults. However, not everyone who experiences a crisis event will need or want PFA. Do not force help on people who do not want it, but make yourself easily available to those who may want support.

There may be situations when someone needs much more advanced support than PFA alone. Know your limits and get help from others, such as medical personnel (if available), your colleagues or other people in the area, local authorities, or community and religious leaders. In the following box we have listed people who need more immediate advanced support. People in these situations need medical or other help as a priority to save life.

People who need more immediate advanced support:

- people with serious, life-threatening injuries who need emergency medical care;
- people who are so upset that they cannot care for themselves or their children;
- people who may hurt themselves;
- people who may hurt others.

5. When is PFA provided?

Although people may need access to help and support for a long time after an event, PFA is aimed at helping people who have been very recently affected by a crisis event. You can provide PFA when you first have contact with very distressed people. This is usually during or immediately after an event. However, it may sometimes be days or weeks after, depending on how long the event lasted and how severe it was.



6. Where is PFA provided?

You can offer PFA wherever it is safe enough for you to do so. This is often in community settings, such as at the scene of an accident, or places where distressed people are served, such as health centres, shelters or camps, schools and distribution sites for food or other types of help. Ideally, try to provide PFA where you can have some privacy to talk with the person when appropriate. For people who have been exposed to certain types of crisis events, such as sexual violence, privacy is essential for confidentiality and to respect the person's dignity.

7. Who Delivers Psychological First Aid?

Psychological First Aid is designed for delivery by mental health and other disaster response workers who provide early assistance to affected children, families, and adults as part of an organized disaster response effort. These providers may be imbedded in a variety of response units, including first responder teams, incident command systems, primary and emergency health care, school crisis response teams, faith-based organizations, Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT), Medical Reserve Corps, the Citizens Corps, and other disaster relief organizations.

8. Strengths of Psychological First Aid

- Psychological First Aid includes basic information-gathering techniques to help providers make rapid assessments of survivors' immediate concerns and needs, and to implement supportive activities in a flexible manner.
- Psychological First Aid relies on field-tested, evidence-informed strategies that can be provided in a variety of disaster settings.
- Psychological First Aid emphasizes developmentally and culturally appropriate interventions for survivors of various ages and backgrounds.
- Psychological First Aid includes handouts that provide important information for youth, adults, and families for their use over the course of recovery.

9. Basic Objectives of Psychological First Aid

- Establish a human connection in a non-intrusive, compassionate manner.
- Enhance immediate and ongoing safety, and provide physical and emotional comfort.
- Calm and orient emotionally overwhelmed or distraught survivors. ☑ Help survivors to tell you specifically what their immediate needs and concerns are and gather additional information as appropriate.
- Offer practical assistance and information to help survivors address their immediate needs and concerns
- Connect survivors as soon as possible to social support networks, including family members, friends, neighbors, and community helping resources.
- Support adaptive coping, acknowledge coping efforts and strengths, and empower survivors; encourage adults, children, and families to take an active role in their recovery.
- Provide information that may help survivors cope effectively with the psychological impact of disasters.
- Be clear about your availability, and (when appropriate) link the survivor to another member of a disaster response team or to local recovery systems, mental health services, public-sector services, and organizations.

10. Delivering Psychological First Aid

Professional Behavior

- Model healthy responses; be calm, courteous, organized, and helpful.
- Be visible and available.
- Maintain confidentiality as appropriate.
- Remain within the scope of your expertise and your designated role.
- Make appropriate referrals when additional expertise is needed or requested by the survivor.
- Be knowledgeable and sensitive to issues of culture and diversity.
- Pay attention to your own emotional and physical reactions, and practice self-care.

Chapter 2: How to help responsibly

1. Respect safety, dignity and rights

When you take on the responsibility to help in situations where people have been affected by a distressing event, it is important to act in ways that respect the safety, dignity and rights of the people you are helping. The following principles apply to any person or agency involved in humanitarian response, including those who provide PFA:

Respect people's...	
<i>Safety</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Avoid putting people at further risk of harm as a result of your actions.• Make sure, to the best of your ability, that the adults and children you help are safe and protect them from physical or psychological harm.
<i>Dignity</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Treat people with respect and according to their cultural and social norms.
<i>Rights</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make sure people can access help fairly and without discrimination.• Help people to claim their rights and access available support.• Act only in the best interest of any person you encounter.

Keep these principles in mind in all of your actions and with all people you encounter, whatever their age, gender or ethnic background. Consider what these principles mean in terms of your cultural context. Know and follow your agency codes of conduct at all times if you work or volunteer for an agency that has these codes.

We offer the following **Ethical Do's and Don'ts** as guidance **to avoid causing further harm to the person, to provide the best care possible, and to act only in their best interest.**

<i>Do's</i>	<i>Don'ts</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Be honest and trustworthy.• Respect people's right to make their own decisions.• Be aware of and set aside your own biases and prejudices.• Make it clear to people that even if they refuse help now, they can still access help in the future.• Respect privacy and keep the person's story confidential, if this is appropriate.• Behave appropriately by considering the person's culture, age and gender.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't exploit your relationship as a helper.• Don't ask the person for any money or favour for helping them.• Don't make false promises or give false information.• Don't exaggerate your skills.• Don't force help on people, and don't be intrusive or pushy.• Don't pressure people to tell you their story.• Don't share the person's story with others.• Don't judge the person for their actions or feelings.

2. Adapt what you do to take account of the person's culture

Whenever there is a crisis event, there are often people of various cultural backgrounds among the affected population, including minorities or others who may be marginalized. Culture determines how we relate to people, and what is all right and not all right to say and do. For example, in some cultures it is not customary for a person to share feelings with someone outside their family. Or it may only be appropriate for women to speak with other women, or perhaps certain ways of dressing or covering oneself are very important.

You may find yourself working with people of backgrounds different from your own. As a helper, it is important to be aware of your own cultural background and beliefs so you can set aside your own biases. Offer help in ways that are most appropriate and comfortable to the people you are supporting.

Each crisis situation is unique. Adapt this guide to the context, considering local social and cultural norms. See the following box for questions you can consider in providing PFA in different cultures.

Consider the following questions as you prepare to offer PFA in different cultures:

<i>Dress</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do I need to dress a certain way to be respectful? • Will impacted people be in need of certain clothing items to keep their dignity and customs?
<i>Language</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the customary way of greeting people in this culture? • What language do they speak?
<i>Gender, Age and Power</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Should affected women only be approached by women helpers? • Who may I approach? (In other words, the head of the family or community?)
<i>Touching and Behaviour</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the usual customs around touching people? • Is it all right to hold someone's hand or touch their shoulder? • Are there special things to consider in terms of behaviour around the elderly, children, women or others?
<i>Beliefs and Religion</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who are the different ethnic and religious groups among the affected people? • What beliefs or practices are important to the people affected? • How might they understand or explain what has happened?



3. Be aware of other emergency response measures

PFA is part of a broader response to large humanitarian emergencies. When hundreds or thousands of people are affected, different types of emergency response measures take place, such as search-and-rescue operations, emergency health care, shelter, food distribution, and family tracing and child protection activities. Often it is challenging for aid workers and volunteers to know exactly what services are available where. This is true during mass disasters and in places that do not already have a functioning infrastructure for health and other services.

Try to be aware of what services and support may be available so you can share information with people you are helping and tell them how to access practical help.

Whenever possible in responding to a crisis situation:

- follow the direction of relevant authorities managing the crisis;
- learn what emergency responses are being organized and what resources are available to help people, if any;
- don't get in the way of search-and-rescue or emergency medical personnel; and
- Know your role and the limits of your role.

It is not necessary to have a “psychosocial” background in order to offer PFA. However, if you want to help in crisis settings, we recommend that you work through an organization or community group. If you act on your own, you may put yourself at risk, it may have a negative effect on coordination efforts, and you are unlikely to be able to link affected people with the resources and support they need.

4. Look after yourself

Helping responsibly also means taking care of your own health and wellbeing. As a helper, you may be affected by what you experience in a crisis situation, or you or your family may be directly affected by the event. It is important to pay extra attention to your own wellbeing and be sure that you are physically and emotionally able to help others. Take care of yourself so that you can best care for others. If working in a team, be aware of the wellbeing of your fellow helpers as well.

Chapter 3: Providing Psychological First Aid (PFA)



1. Good communication

The way you communicate with someone in distress is very important. People who have been through a crisis event may be very upset, anxious or confused. Some people may blame themselves for things that happened during the crisis. Being calm and showing understanding can help people in distress feel more safe and secure, understood, respected and cared for appropriately.

Someone who has been through a distressing event may want to tell you their story. Listening to someone's story can be a great support. However, it is important **not to pressure** anyone to tell you what they have been through. Some people may not want to speak about what has happened or their circumstances. However, they may value it if you stay with them quietly, let them know you are there if they want to talk, or offer practical support like a meal or a glass of water. Don't talk too much; allow for silence. Keeping silent for a while may give the person space and encourage them to share with you if they wish.

To communicate well, be aware of both your words and body language, such as facial expressions, eye contact, gestures, and the way you sit or stand in relation to the other person. Each culture has its own particular ways of behaving that are appropriate and respectful. Speak and behave in ways that take into account the person's culture, age, gender, customs and religion.

Below are suggestions for things to say and do, and what **not** to say and do. Most importantly, be yourself, be genuine and be sincere in offering your help and care.

Things To Say And Do

- Try to find a quiet place to talk, and minimize outside distractions.
- Respect privacy and keep the person's story confidential, if this is appropriate.
- Stay near the person but keep an appropriate distance depending on their age, gender and culture.
- Let them know you are listening; for example, nod your head or say "hmmmm...."
- Be patient and calm.
- Provide factual information, **if** you have it. Be honest about what you know and don't know. "I don't know, but I will try to find out about that for you."
- Give information in a way the person can understand – keep it simple.
- Acknowledge how they are feeling and any losses or important events they tell you about, such as loss of their home or death of a loved one. "I'm so sorry. I can imagine this is very sad for you."
- Acknowledge the person's strengths and how they have helped themselves.
- Allow for silence.

Things Not To Say And Do

- Don't pressure someone to tell their story.
- Don't interrupt or rush someone's story (for example, don't look at your watch or speak too rapidly).
- Don't touch the person if you're not sure it is appropriate to do so.
- Don't judge what they have or haven't done, or how they are feeling. Don't say: "You shouldn't feel that way," or "You should feel lucky you survived."
- Don't make up things you don't know.
- Don't use terms that are too technical.
- Don't tell them someone else's story.
- Don't talk about your own troubles.
- Don't give false promises or false reassurances.
- Don't think and act as if you must solve all the person's problems for them.
- Don't take away the person's strength and sense of being able to care for themselves.
- Don't talk about people in negative terms (for example, don't call them "crazy" or "mad").

Keep good communication in mind as you **look, listen** and **link** – the action principles of PFA covered in the following pages.

2. Prepare – learn about the situation



Crisis situations can be chaotic and often need urgent action. However, wherever possible before entering a crisis site, try to get accurate information about the situation. Consider the following questions:

Before entering a crisis site, learn about the following:

Important questions	
<i>The crisis event</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• What happened?• When and where did it take place?• How many people are likely to be affected and who are they?
<i>Available Services and supports</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who is providing for basic needs like emergency medical care, food, water, shelter or tracing family members?• Where and how can people access those services?• Who else is helping? Are community members involved in responding?
<i>Safety and security concerns</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Is the crisis event over or continuing, such as continuing conflict?• What dangers may be in the environment, such as rebels, landmines or damaged infrastructure?• Are there areas to avoid entering because they are not secure (for example, obvious physical dangers) or because you are not allowed to be there?

These important preparation questions can help you to understand the situation you are entering, to offer PFA more effectively and to be more aware of your safety.

3. Action principles of PFA – look, listen and link

The three basic action principles of PFA are look, listen and link. These action principles will help guide how you view and safely enter a crisis situation, approach affected people and understand their needs, and link them with practical support and information (see the table below):

Look

- Check for safety.
- Check for people with obvious urgent basic needs.
- Check for people with serious distress reactions.



Crisis situations can change rapidly. What you find at the scene may be different from what you learned before entering the crisis situation. Therefore, it is important to take time – even a few moments – to “look” around you before offering help. If you suddenly find yourself in a crisis situation without time to prepare, this may be just a quick scan. These moments will give you a chance to **be calm, be safe and think before you act**. See the following table for questions to consider and important messages as you “look” around you



See the following table for questions to consider and important messages as you “look” around you.

Look	Questions	Important message
<i>Safety</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What dangers can you see in the environment, such as active conflict, damaged roads, or unsecure buildings? • Can you be there without likely harm to yourself or others? 	<p>If you are not certain about the safety of the crisis site, then do not go. Try to get help for people in need. If possible, communicate with people in distress from a safe distance.</p>
<i>People with obvious urgent basic needs</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does anyone appear to be critically injured and in need of emergency medical help? • Does anyone seem to need rescuing, such as people trapped or in immediate danger? • Does anyone have obvious urgent basic needs, such as protection from the weather, torn clothing? • Which people may need help in terms of accessing basic services and special attention to be protected from discrimination and violence? • Who else is available around me to help? 	<p>Know your role and try to get help for people who need special assistance or who have obvious urgent basic needs. Refer critically injured people to medical personnel or others trained in physical first aid.</p>

People with serious distress reactions

- Are there people who appear extremely upset, not able to move on their own, not responding to others, or in shock?
- Where and who are the most distressed people?

Consider who may benefit from PFA and how you can best help.

People may react in various ways to a crisis. Some examples of distress responses to crisis are listed below:

- physical symptoms (for example, shaking, headaches, feeling very tired, loss of appetite, aches and pains)
- crying, sadness, depressed mood, grief
- anxiety, fear
- being “on guard” or “jumpy”
- worry that something really bad is going to happen
- insomnia, nightmares
- irritability, anger
- guilt, shame (for example, for having survived, or for not helping or saving others)
- confused, emotionally numb, or feeling unreal or in a daze
- appearing withdrawn or very still (not moving)
- not responding to others, not speaking at all
- disorientation (for example, not knowing their own name, where they are from, or what happened)
- not being able to care for themselves or their children (for example, not eating or drinking, not able to make simple decisions)

Some people may only be mildly distressed or not distressed at all.

Most people will recover well over time, especially if they can restore their basic needs and receive support such as help from those around them and/or PFA. However, people with either severe or long-lasting distress reactions may need more support than PFA alone, particularly if they cannot function in their daily

life or if they are a danger to themselves or others. Make sure that severely distressed people are not left alone and try to keep them safe until the reaction passes or until you can find help from health personnel, local leaders or other community members in the area.

Also, look for people among the affected population who are likely to need special attention for their care and safety:

People who are likely to need special attention in a crisis

- Children – including adolescents – especially those separated from their caregivers, may need protection from abuse and exploitation. They will also likely need care from those around them and help to meet their basic needs.
- People with health conditions or physical and mental disabilities may need special help to get to a safe place, to be protected from abuse and to access medical care and other services. This may include frail elderly people, pregnant women, people with severe mental disorders, or people with visual or hearing difficulties.
- People at risk of discrimination or violence, such as women or people of certain ethnic groups, may need special protection to be safe in the crisis setting and support to access available help.



Listen

- Approach people who may need support.
- Ask about people's needs and concerns.
- Listen to people, and help them to feel calm.



Listening properly to people you are helping is essential to understand their situation and needs, to help them to feel calm, and to be able to offer appropriate help. Learn to listen with your:

- Eyes » giving the person your undivided attention
- Ears » truly hearing their concerns
- Heart » with caring and showing respect

A. Approach people who may need support:

- Approach people respectfully and according to their culture.
- Introduce yourself by name and organization.
- Ask if you can provide help.
- If possible, find a safe and quiet place to talk.
- Help the person feel comfortable; for example, offer water if you can.
- Try to keep the person safe:
 - ✓ Remove the person from immediate danger, if it is safe to do so.
 - ✓ Try to protect the person from exposure to the media for their privacy and dignity.
 - ✓ If the person is very distressed, try make sure they are not alone.

B. Ask about people's needs and concerns:

- Although some needs may be obvious, such as a blanket or covering for someone whose clothing is torn, always ask what people need and what their concerns are.
- Find out what is most important to them at this moment, and help them work out what their priorities are.

C. Listen to people and help them to feel calm:

- Stay close to the person.
- Do not pressure the person to talk.
- Listen in case they want to talk about what happened.
- If they are very distressed, help them to feel calm and try to make sure they are not alone.

Help people to feel calm:

Some people who experience a crisis situation may be very anxious or upset. They may feel confused or overwhelmed, and may have some physical reactions such as shaking or trembling, difficulty breathing or feeling their heart pounding. The following are some techniques to help very distressed people to feel calm in their mind and body:

- Keep your tone of voice calm and soft.
- If culturally appropriate, try to maintain some eye contact with the person as you talk with them.
- Remind the person that you are there to help them. Remind them that they are safe, if it is true.
- If someone feels unreal or disconnected from their surroundings, it may help them to make contact with their current environment and themselves. You can do this by asking them to:
 - ✓ Place and feel their feet on the floor.
 - ✓ Tap their fingers or hands on their lap.
 - ✓ Notice some non-distressing things in their environment, such as things they can see, hear or feel. Have them tell you what they see and hear.
 - ✓ Encourage the person to focus on their breathing, and to breathe slowly.



Link

- Help people address basic needs and access services.
- Help people cope with problems.
- Give information.
- Connect people with loved ones and social support.



Although each crisis situation is unique, people who are affected often need the things listed in the following box:

Frequent needs:

- Basic needs, such as shelter, food, and water and sanitation.
- Health services for injuries or help with chronic (long-term) medical conditions.
- Understandable and correct information about the event, loved ones and available services.
- Being able to contact loved ones, friends and other social supports.
- Access to specific support related to one's culture or religion.
- Being consulted and involved in important decisions.

People may feel vulnerable, isolated or powerless after a distressing event. In some situations, their daily life is disrupted. They may be unable to access their usual supports, or they may find themselves suddenly living in stressful conditions. Linking people with practical support is a major part of PFA. Remember that PFA is often a one-time intervention and you may only be there to help for a short time. Affected people will need to use their own coping skills to recover in the long term.

(Help people to help themselves and to regain control of their situation)



I. Help people address basic needs and access services

In helping people to address basic needs, consider the following:

- Immediately after a crisis event, try to help the person in distress to meet the basic needs they request, such as food, water, shelter and sanitation.
- Learn what specific needs people have – such as health care, clothing or items for feeding small children (cups and bottles) – and try to link them to the help available.
- Make sure vulnerable or marginalized people are not overlooked.
- Follow up with people if you promise to do so.

II. Help people cope with problems

A person in distress can feel overwhelmed with worries and fears. Help them to consider their most urgent needs, and how to prioritize and address them. For example, you can ask them to think about what they need to address now, and what can wait for later. Being able to manage a few issues will give the person a greater sense of control in the situation and strengthen their own ability to cope. Remember to:

- help people identify supports in their life, such as friends or family, who can help them in the current situation;
- give practical suggestions for people to meet their own needs (for example, explain how the person can register to receive food aid or material assistance);
- ask the person to consider how they coped with difficult situations in the past, and affirm their ability to cope with the current situation;
- ask the person what helps them to feel better. Encourage them to use positive coping strategies and avoid negative coping strategies (see the following table).



Coping

Everyone has natural ways of coping. Encourage people to use their own positive coping strategies, while avoiding negative strategies. This will help them feel stronger and regain a sense of control. You will need to adapt the following suggestions to take account of the person's culture and what is possible in the particular crisis situation.

Encourage positive coping strategies

- Get enough rest.
- Eat as regularly as possible and drink water.
- Talk and spend time with family and friends.
- Discuss problems with someone you trust.
- Do activities that help you relax (walk, sing, pray, play with children).
- Do physical exercise.
- Find safe ways to help others in the crisis and get involved in community activities.

Discourage negative coping strategies

- Don't take drugs, smoke or drink alcohol.
- Don't sleep all day.
- Don't work all the time without any rest or relaxation.
- Don't isolate yourself from friends and loved ones.
- Don't neglect basic personal hygiene.
- Don't be violent.

III. Give information

People affected by a crisis event will want accurate information about:

- the event
- loved ones or others who are impacted
- their safety
- their rights
- how to access the services and things they need

Getting accurate information after a crisis event may be difficult. The situation may change as information about the crisis event becomes known and relief measures are put in place. Rumours may be common. You may not have all the answers in any given moment, but wherever possible:

- find out where to get correct information, and when and where to get updates;
- try to get as much information as you can before you approach people to offer support;
- try to keep updated about the state of the crisis, safety issues, available services, and the whereabouts and condition of missing or injured people;
- make sure people are told what is happening and about any plans;
- if services are available (health services, family tracing, shelter, food distribution),
- make sure people know about them and can access them;
- provide people contact details for services, or refer them directly;
- Make sure vulnerable people also know about existing services.

In giving information to affected people::

- explain the source of the information you are providing and how reliable it is;
- only say what you know – **do not** make up information or give false reassurances;
- keep messages simple and accurate, and repeat the message to be sure people hear and understand the information;
- it may be useful to give information to groups of affected people, so that everyone hears the same message;
- let people know if you will keep them updated on new developments, including where and when.

When giving information, be aware that the helper can become a target of the frustration and anger people may feel when their expectations of help have not been met by you or others. In these situations, try to remain calm and be understanding.

IV. **Connect with loved ones and social support**

It has been shown that people who feel they had good social support after a crisis cope better than those who feel they were not well supported. Because of this, linking people with loved ones and social support is an important part of PFA.

- Help keep families together, and keep children with their parents and loved ones.
- Help people to contact friends and relatives so they can get support; for example, provide a way for them to call loved ones.
- If a person lets you know that prayer, religious practice or support from religious leaders might be helpful for them, try to connect them with their spiritual community. See the following box for suggestions about crisis situations and spirituality.
- Help bring affected people together to help each other. For example, ask people to help care for the elderly, or link individuals without family to other community members.

Crisis and spirituality

In crisis situations, a person's spiritual or religious beliefs may be very important in helping them through pain and suffering, providing meaning, and giving a sense of hope. Being able to pray and practise rituals can be a great comfort. However, the experience of crisis – particularly in the face of terrible losses – can also cause people to question their beliefs. People's faith may be challenged, made stronger or changed by this experience. Here are some suggestions about the spiritual aspects of providing care and comfort after a distressing event:

- Be aware of and respect the person's religious background.
- Ask the person what generally helps them to feel better. Encourage them to do things that help them to cope, including spiritual routines if they mention these.
- Listen respectfully, and without judgment, to spiritual beliefs or questions the person may have.
- Don't impose your beliefs, or spiritual or religious interpretations of the crisis, on the person.
- Don't agree with or reject a spiritual belief or interpretation of the crisis, even if the person asks you to do so..

1. Ending your help

What happens next? When and how you stop providing help will depend on the context of the crisis, your role and situation, and the needs of the people you are helping. Use your best judgment of the situation, the person's needs and your own needs. If appropriate, explain to the person that you are leaving, and if someone else will be helping them from that point on, try and introduce them to that person. If you have linked the person with other services, let them know what to expect and be sure they have the details to follow up. No matter what your experience has been with the person, you can say goodbye in a positive way by wishing them well.

Annex 1: Case scenario for violence and displacement



Refugees are being brought to a new location in trucks and told that they will be living in this new place. They were moved because of the war in their previous area. As they get off the trucks, some of them are crying, some appear very fearful, some seem disoriented, while others are sighing with relief. Most are afraid and doubtful of this new place, and have no idea where they will sleep, eat or receive health care. Some seem scared when they hear any loud noise, thinking they are hearing gunfire again. You are a volunteer with an agency that distributes food items and have been asked to help out at distribution sites.

As you prepare to help, consider what you would like to know about this situation:

- Who are the people I will be helping? What is their cultural background?
- Are there any rules of conduct or customs I need to follow? For example, is it more appropriate for women helpers to speak with women refugees?
- How far have they travelled? What do I know about the conflict they have experienced?
- What services are being provided in the place the refugees are being received?

- If I am working in a team, how will we organize ourselves to help in this situation? What tasks will each person take on? How will we coordinate with each other and with other groups of helpers who may be there?

As you encounter the group of refugees, what should you look for?

- What will most of the refugees need? Will they be hungry, thirsty or tired? Is anyone injured or ill?
- Are there families or people from the same village within the refugee group?
- Are there any unaccompanied children or adolescents? Who else may need special help?
- Individuals in the refugee group seem to be having different types of reactions to the crisis. What kinds of serious emotional responses do you see? †

As you approach people among the refugee group, **how can you best listen** to their concerns and give comfort?

- How will I introduce myself to offer support?
- People who experienced or witnessed violence may be very frightened and feel unsafe. How can I support them and help them feel calm?
- How can I find out the needs and concerns of people who may need special help, such as women?
- How will I approach and help unaccompanied children and adolescents?

Sample conversation with an unaccompanied child

At the edge of the refugee group, you notice a boy of about 10 years old standing alone and looking very frightened.

You *[getting down on one knee at the eye level of the child]:* Hi, my name is _____. I'm with _____ agency and I'm here to help. What is your name?

Child *[looking down and speaking softly]:* Adam.

You: Hi Adam. You just had a long ride to get here. Are you thirsty?
[Offer something to eat or drink or some other practical comfort like a blanket if you have it.] Where is your family?

Child: I don't know. *[beginning to cry]*

You: I can see you're scared, Adam. I will try to help you and connect you with people who will help to locate your family. Can you tell me your surname and where you are from?

Child: Yes, I'm Adam Duvall. I'm from __ village

You: Thank you, Adam. When is the last time you saw your family?

Child: My older sister was there when the trucks came to bring us here. But now I can't find her.

You: How old is your sister? What is her name?

Child: Her name is Rose. She's 15.

You: I will try to help you find your sister. Where are your parents?

Child: We all ran from the village when we heard the gunfire. We got lost from my parents. *[crying]*

You: I'm sorry, Adam. That must have been scary for you, but you're safe now.

Child: I am scared

You: *[in a warm, natural manner]:* I understand. I would like to help you.

Child: What should I do?

You: I can stay with you for a while, and we can try to find your sister. Would you like that?

Child: Yes, thank you.

You: Is there anything else worrying you or anything that you need?

Child: No.

You: Adam, it is important that we talk with the people over there who can help find your sister or other family. I will go with you to talk to them. *[It is essential to help the child to register with a reputable family tracing or child protection organization, if available.]*

In this sample conversation, notice that you:

- saw an unaccompanied child in the crowd of refugees;
- got down on one knee to speak with the child on his eye level;
- spoke calmly and kindly to the child;
- found out information about the child's family, including the name of his sister;
- stayed with the child while identifying a trustworthy family tracing organization that could organize a safe place for the child to stay until his family is found.

What can you do to link people with information and practical support?

- What basic needs might people have? What services do I know are available? How can people access them?
- What accurate information do I have about the plans for caring for these refugees? When and where can people find more information about what is happening?
- How can I help to protect vulnerable people, such as women or unaccompanied children, from further harm? How can I help link vulnerable people with loved ones and services?
- What special needs might people have, including those who have been exposed to violence?
- What can I do to connect people with their loved ones or services?