

Supporting Children after Mass Violence Events: Resources for Educators

National Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center
Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences
Medical University of South Carolina
Charleston, SC

Psychological Impact of the Recent Shooting

The combination of life-threatening traumatic personal experiences, loss of loved ones, disruption of routines and expectations of daily life, and post-violence adversities pose psychological challenges to the recovery of children and families in the affected areas. The following issues may be helpful to consider:

Reactions to Danger

Danger refers to the sense that events or activities have the potential to cause harm. In the wake of the recent catastrophic violence, people and communities have greater appreciation for the enormous danger of violence and terrorism and the need for effective emergency management plans. There will be widespread *fears of recurrence* that are increased by misinformation and rumors. Danger always increases the need and desire to be close to others, making *separation* from family members and friends more difficult.

Posttraumatic Stress Reactions

Posttraumatic Stress Symptoms

Posttraumatic stress symptoms are common, understandable, and expected after traumatic events, but are nevertheless serious. There are four different types of PTSD symptoms:

- 1) **Intrusive Symptoms** are ways the traumatic experience comes back to mind when you don't want it to. These include recurrent upsetting thoughts, dreams, or images; strong emotional reactions to reminders of the attacks; and feelings that you are actually experiencing the traumatic experience all over again ("flashbacks");
- 2) **Avoidance Symptoms** include avoiding people, places, things, situations, or conversations, that are reminders of the traumatic events;
- 3) **Negative Changes in Thoughts and Mood Symptoms** include negative beliefs about yourself, other people, or the world; a negative emotional state, feeling detached or estranged from other people, losing interest in usual pleasurable activities, and inability to have positive emotions; and
- 4) **Physical Arousal and Reactivity Symptoms** include irritable behavior and angry outbursts, reckless and self-destructive behavior, constantly being "on the lookout for danger," being startled when you unexpectedly hear a loud noise, poor concentration, and sleep difficulties.

These symptoms are often very distressing to people, and they can cause problems at work, at school, and in relationships with family members or friends.

Grief Reactions

Grief reactions are normal, vary from person to person, and can last for many years. There is no single "correct" course of grieving. Personal, family, religious, and cultural factors affect the course of grief. Over time, grief reactions tend to include more pleasant thoughts and activities, such as positive reminiscing or finding uplifting ways to memorialize or remember a loved one.

Traumatic Grief

People who have suffered the loss of a loved one under traumatic circumstances often find grieving even more difficult than it might otherwise be. Their minds stay on the circumstances of the death, including preoccupations with how the loss could have been prevented, what the last moments were like, and issues of accountability. Traumatic grief changes the course of mourning, putting individuals on a different time course than is usually expected.

Depression

Depression is associated with prolonged grief and strongly related to the accumulation of post-violent adversities. Symptoms can include depressed or irritable mood, change in sleep or appetite, decreased interest in life activities, fatigue, and feelings of hopelessness and worthlessness. Some youth and adults may experience suicidal thoughts.

Physical Symptoms

Survivors may experience physical symptoms, even in the absence of any underlying physical injury or illness. These symptoms include headaches, stomachaches, rapid heartbeat, tightness in the chest, change in appetite, and digestive problems. In particular, the smell of smoke can lead to panic reactions, especially in response to reminders. Panic often is expressed by cardiac, respiratory, and other physical symptoms. More general anxiety reactions are also to be expected.

This document as a whole is a collaborative effort of the National Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center and The National Traumatic Child Stress Network, but the paragraph on PTSD has been updated by the National Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center.

Psychological Impact of the Recent Shooting
National Child Traumatic Stress Network
www.NCTSN.org

Trauma and Loss Reminders

Trauma reminders: Many people will continue to encounter places, people, sights, sounds, smells, and inner feelings that remind them of the shooting. The sounds of gunfire, the smell of smoke, and people screaming have become powerful reminders. Adults and youth are often not aware that they are responding to a reminder, and the reason for their change in mood or behavior may go unrecognized. Media coverage can easily serve as unwelcome reminders. It is particularly difficult when loved ones/friends have been together during a traumatic experience, because afterward they can serve as trauma reminders to each other, leading to unrecognized disturbances in these important relationships, especially in a young person's life. *Loss reminders:* Those who have lost loved ones continue to encounter situations and circumstances that remind them of the absence of their loved one. These reminders can bring on feelings of sadness, emptiness in the survivor's life, and missing or longing for the loved one's presence.

Post-violent Stress and Adversities

Contending with ongoing stresses and adversities can significantly deplete coping and emotional resources and, in turn, interfere with recovery from posttraumatic stress, traumatic grief, and depressive reactions. For example, school aged children may exhibit confusion, somatic responses (e.g., headaches, stomachaches), unusually aggressive or restless behaviors, or concerns about safety. Medical treatment and ongoing physical rehabilitation can be a source of additional stress. New or additional traumatic experiences and losses are known to exacerbate distress and interfere with recovery. Likewise, distress associated with prior traumatic experiences or losses can be renewed by the experience of the shooting. Youth's recovery is put in jeopardy without properly addressing changes in their relationships, monitoring of their at-risk behaviors, and assisting with changes to future life goals. Some adversities require large-scale responses, while others can be addressed, in part, by personal and family problem solving.

Consequences of These Reactions

Intrusive images and reactivity to reminders can seriously interfere with school performance and avoidance of reminders can lead to restrictions on important activities, relationships, interests and plans for the future. Irritability and impaired decision-making can interfere with getting along with family members and friends. Trauma-related sleep disturbance is often overlooked, but can be persistent and affect daily functioning. Some may respond by being unusually aggressive or restless, needing to be around parents or caregivers more than usual, or voicing fears or concerns about their safety or the safety of their friends. Adolescents may become inconsistent in their behavior, start to withdraw and avoid social situations, become overly confrontational or aggressive, or engage in high risk behaviors (e.g., driving recklessly, using drugs and alcohol). Depressive reactions can become quite serious, leading to a major decline in school performance, social isolation, loss of interest in normal activities, self-medication, acting-out behavior, and, most seriously, attempts at suicide. Traumatic grief can lead to the inability to mourn, reminisce and remember, fear of a similar fate or the sudden loss of other loved ones, and to difficulties in establishing or maintaining new relationships. Adolescents may respond to traumatic losses by trying to become too self-sufficient and independent or by becoming more dependent and taking less initiative.

Coping after Catastrophic Violence

In addition to meeting people's basic needs, there are several ways to enhance people's coping. Physical: Stress can be reduced with proper nutrition, exercise and sleep. Youth and adults may need to be reminded that they should take care of themselves physically to be of help to loved ones, friends, and communities. Emotional: Youth and adults need to be reminded that their emotional reactions are expected, and will decrease over time. However, if their reactions are too extreme or do not diminish over time, there are professionals who can be of help. Social: Communication with, and support from, family members, friends, religious institutions and the community are very helpful in coping after catastrophic violence. People should be encouraged to communicate with others, and to seek and use this support where available.

Restoring a sense of safety and security, and providing opportunities for normal development within the social, family and community context are important steps to the recovery of children, adolescents, and families.

Helping Youth after Community Trauma: Tips for Educators

Traumatic events such as a natural disaster; school violence; traumatic death of an educator or peer can impact students' learning, behavior, and relationships. Here are some reactions you might see and how you can help.

Keep in mind, not all students will feel the same way.

STUDENTS WANT YOU TO KNOW THE MAY:	YOU CAN HELP WHEN YOU:
1. Feel sad, scared, empty, or numb. Younger students may be clingy. Older students may be embarrassed to show their distress, and may hide their feelings or share more on social media.	1. Provide support by listening to concerns and feelings. Educate students about different trauma reactions. Don't assume all students feel the same or need help but try to accommodate students' different responses.
2. Have behavior problems that are new or worse (e.g., have outbursts, be irritable, break rules). Some may engage in serious or harmful behaviors (e.g., drug or alcohol abuse, self-injury, or risky sexual behavior).	2. Have patience with minor behavior problems. Stay calm when setting limits. Return to predictable school routines and activities as soon as possible. <i>Refer students for professional help for any concerns about self-injury or dangerous behaviors.</i>
3. Have trouble concentrating, paying attention, participating, or getting work done on time.	3. Understand that attention and doing classroom activities may be affected. Focus on the present with gentle reminders about daily tasks. Consider modifying work or providing extra structure and instructions.
4. Appear sleepy or irritable due to having sleep problems.	4. Realize that sleep difficulties are common and can lead to fatigue and poor participation. Suggest healthy sleep habits (e.g. a break from screens before bed) and calming coping strategies. Consider adjusting deadlines until sleep is stabilized.
5. Have physical trauma reactions like stomach aches, headaches, a pounding heart, body aches, or fast, shallow breathing.	5. Recognize physical reactions may confuse or scare students, making them even more afraid. Encourage students to use relaxation strategies such as slow breathing, stretching, or physical activity.
6. Startle more easily in response to everyday noises (e.g. a pencil dropping, door slamming, the P.A. system crackling, kids yelling) and become scared.	6. Identify the sources of everyday noises and that these are not dangerous. Reassure students that they are safe. Explain that physical responses (e.g., feeling startled, tense muscles, fast breathing) are common after a trauma when they are on high alert. Suggest using calming strategies such as slow breathing.
7. Think life is meaningless, or withdraw from family and friends. Even students who are typically outgoing may become withdrawn. They may retreat to social media, gaming or online activities.	7. Suggest engaging in positive activities (e.g., volunteering, hobbies). Discuss ways to cope with sad feelings and the value of in-person support, talking with family or friends, rather than connecting via media. Discuss ways to support students with other adults they trust.
8. Believe that school isn't safe, that the trauma will recur, or have other negative trauma-related thoughts. Students who think their future will be cut short may react by not studying or skipping school.	8. Create a sense of safety by returning to normal, predictable routines as soon as possible. Remind them that such events are rare. Point out ways adults make school safe.
9. Feel responsible for not taking action before, during or after the event to prevent or minimize the outcome. They may feel guilty for not being harmed.	9. Discuss that people did the best they could at the time. Give honest, accurate, and age-appropriate information. Let students know you will tell them the truth.
10. Search the media for information about the event in an attempt to find answers.	10. Suggest they limit the use of media to maintain balance and perspective. Offer to help find answers to difficult questions.

If any of these problems interfere with student functioning, find out how to refer them for specialized help. Educators and professionals should also be aware of their own reactions and seek support as needed.

Talking to Children about the Shooting

The recent shooting has evoked many emotions—sadness, grief, helplessness, anxiety, and anger. Schools are supposed to be one of the safe places, where students go to learn and be with friends. Children who are struggling with their thoughts and feelings about the stories and images of the shooting may turn to trusted adults for help and guidance. Reinforcing safety after this tragedy is important with very young children. They need to hear that their parents/caregivers will do everything they can to keep them safe. Schools will be working to be sure that their school is a safe place for learning and having fun with friends and classmates.

- *Start the conversation.* Talk about the shooting with your child. Not talking about it can make the event even more threatening in your child’s mind. Silence suggests that what has occurred is too horrible even to speak about or that you do not know what has happened. With social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, text messages, newsbreaks on favorite radio and TV stations, and others), it is highly unlikely that children and teenagers have not heard about this. Chances are your child has heard about it, too.
- *What does your child already know?* Start by asking what your child/teen already has heard about the events from the media and from friends. Listen carefully; try to figure out what he or she knows or believes. As your child explains, listen for misinformation, misconceptions, and underlying fears or concerns. Understand that this information will change as more facts about the shooting are known.
- *Gently correct inaccurate information.* If your child/teen has inaccurate information or misconceptions, take time to provide the correct information in simple, clear, age-appropriate language.
- *Encourage your child to ask questions, and answer those questions directly.* Your child/teen may have some difficult questions about the incident. For example, she may ask if it is possible that it could happen at their school; she is probably really asking whether it is “likely.” The concern about re-occurrence will be an issue for caregivers and children/teens alike. While it is important to discuss the likelihood of this risk, she is also asking if she is safe. This may be a time to review plans your family has for keeping safe in the event of *any* crisis situation. Do give any information you have on the help and support the victims and their families are receiving. Let her know that the person responsible is under arrest and cannot hurt anyone else. Like adults, children/teens are better able to cope with a difficult situation when they have the facts about it. Having question-and-answer talks gives your child ongoing support as he or she begins to cope with the range of emotions stirred up by this tragedy.
- *Limit media exposure.* Limit your child’s exposure to media images and sounds of the shooting, and *do not allow your very young children to see or hear any TV/radio shooting-related messages.* Even if they appear to be engrossed in play, children often are aware of what you are watching on TV or listening to on the radio. What may not be upsetting to an adult may be very upsetting and confusing for a child. Limit your own exposure as well. Adults may become more distressed with nonstop exposure to media coverage of this shooting. If your child has watched coverage, take a minute to turn off the television and ask the child about what they think about what was seen. This also gives you an opportunity to discuss the event and gently correct misperceptions.

- Common reactions. Children/Teens may have reactions to this tragedy. In the immediate aftermath of the shooting, they may have more problems paying attention and concentrating. They may become more irritable or defiant. Children and even teens may have trouble separating from caregivers, wanting to stay at home or close by them. It's common for young people to feel anxious about what has happened, what may happen in the future, and how it will impact their lives. Their sleep and appetite routines may change. In general, you should see these reactions lessen within a few weeks.

- Be a positive role model. Consider sharing your feelings about the shooting with your child/teen, but at a level they can understand. You may express sadness and empathy for the victims and their families. You may share some worry, but it is important to also share ideas for coping with difficult situations like this tragedy. When you speak of the quick response by law enforcement and medical personnel to help the victims, you help your child/teen see that there can be good, even in the midst of such a horrific event.

- Be patient. In times of stress, children/teens may have trouble with their behavior, concentration, and attention. While they may not openly ask for your guidance or support, they will want it. Both children and teens will need a little extra patience, care, and love. (Be patient with yourself, too!).

- Extra help. Should reactions continue or at any point interfere with your children's/teens' abilities to function or if you are worried, contact local mental health professionals who have expertise in trauma. Contact your family physician, pediatrician, or state mental health associations for referrals to such experts.

NOTE: Children/teens who were present at the school, knew those directly affected, or have experienced similar incidents will need more support in the days and weeks ahead.

Tips for Talking to Children and Youth After Traumatic Events

A Guide for Parents and Educators



Traumatic events, such as shootings, bombings, or other violent acts, can leave children feeling frightened, confused, and insecure.

Whether a child has personally experienced trauma, has seen the event on television, or has merely heard it discussed by adults, it is important for parents and educators to be informed and ready to help if stress reactions begin to occur.

Children respond to trauma in many different ways. Some may have reactions very soon after the event; others may do fine for weeks or months, and then begin to show troubling behavior. Knowing the signs that are common at different ages can help parents and teachers recognize problems and respond appropriately.

Preschool Age

Children ages 1–5 find it particularly hard to adjust to change and loss. These youngsters have not yet developed their own coping skills, so they must depend on parents, family members, and teachers to help them through difficult times.

Very young children may regress to an earlier behavioral stage after a violent or traumatic event. Preschoolers may resume thumbsucking or bedwetting, or may become afraid of strangers, animals, darkness, or “monsters.” They may cling to a parent or teacher, or become very attached to a place where they feel safe.

Changes in eating and sleeping habits are common, as are unexplainable aches and pains. Other symptoms to watch for

are disobedience, hyperactivity, speech difficulties, and aggressive or withdrawn behavior. Preschoolers may tell exaggerated stories about the traumatic event or may refer to it repeatedly.

Early Childhood

Children ages 5–11 may have some of the same reactions that younger children have. They also may withdraw from playgroups and friends, compete more for the attention of parents, fear going to school, allow school performance to drop, become aggressive, or find it hard to concentrate. These children also may return to more childish behaviors, such as asking to be fed or dressed.

Adolescence

Children ages 12–14 are likely to have vague physical complaints when under stress, and may abandon chores, school work, or other responsibilities they previously handled. Though they may compete vigorously for attention from parents and teachers, they also may withdraw, resist authority, become disruptive at home or in the classroom, or begin to experiment with high-risk behaviors such as alcohol or drug use.





These young people are at a developmental stage in which the opinions of others are very important. They need to be thought of as “normal” by their friends and are less concerned about relating well with adults or participating in family activities they once enjoyed.

In later adolescence, teens may experience feelings of helplessness and guilt because they are unable to assume full adult responsibilities as the community responds to the traumatic event. Older teens may deny the extent of their reactions to the traumatic event.

How to Help

Reassurance is the key to helping children through a traumatic time. Very young children need a lot of cuddling, as well as verbal support. Answer questions about the event honestly, but do not dwell on frightening details or allow the subject to dominate family or classroom time indefinitely. Encourage children of all ages to express emotions through conversation, writing, or artwork and to find a way to help others who were affected by the event.

Try to maintain a normal household or classroom routine, and encourage children to participate in recreational activity. Temporarily reduce your expectations about performance in school or at home, perhaps by substituting less demanding responsibilities for normal chores.

Acknowledge that you, too, may have reactions associated with the traumatic event, and take steps to promote your own physical and emotional healing.

Tips for Talking to Children After a Traumatic Event

- Provide children with opportunities to talk about what they are seeing on television and to ask questions.
- Do not be afraid to admit that you cannot answer all of their questions.
- Answer questions at a level the child can understand.
- Provide ongoing opportunities for children to talk. They probably will have more questions as time goes on.
- Use this as an opportunity to establish a family emergency plan. Feeling that there is something you can do may be very comforting to both children and adults.
- Allow children to discuss other fears and concerns about unrelated issues. This is a good opportunity to explore these issues also.
- Monitor children’s television watching. Some parents may wish to limit their child’s exposure to graphic or troubling scenes. To the extent possible, be present when your child is watching news coverage of the event. It is at these times that questions might arise.



Helpful Resources

National Mental Health Information Center
Toll-Free: 1-800-789-2647 (English and Español)
TDD: 1-866-889-2647
Web Site: www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov

National Clearinghouse for Alcohol and Drug Information
Toll-Free: 1-800-729-6686 (English and Español)
TDD: 1-800-487-4889
Web Site: www.ncadi.samhsa.gov

Treatment Locators

Mental Health Services Locator
Toll-Free: 1-800-789-2647 (English and Español)
TDD: 1-866-889-2647
Web Site: www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/databases

Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator
Toll-Free: 1-800-662-HELP (4357) (24/7 English and Español)
TDD: 1-800-487-4889
Web Site: www.findtreatment.samhsa.gov

Hotlines

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline
Toll-Free: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)
TTY: 1-800-799-4TTY (4889)
Web Site: www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org

Office for Victims of Crime
Toll-Free: 1-800-851-3420
TTY: 1-877-712-9279
Web Site: www.ojp.usdoj.gov/ovc/ovcres/welcome.html

Other Resources

National Child Traumatic Stress Network
Web Site: www.nctsn.org

National Association of School Psychologists
Phone: (301) 657-0270
Web Site: www.nasponline.org/NEAT

National Center for Children Exposed to Violence
Phone: (203) 785-7047
Toll-Free: 1-877-49-NCCEV (496-2238)
Fax: (203) 785-4608
Web Site: www.ncccev.org/violence/children_terrorism.htm

Note: Inclusion of a resource in this fact sheet does not imply endorsement by the Center for Mental Health Services, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

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- Help children understand that there are no bad emotions and that a wide range of reactions is normal. Encourage children to express their feelings to adults (including teachers and parents) who can help them understand their sometimes strong and troubling emotions.
- Be careful not to scapegoat or generalize about any particular cultural or ethnic group. Try not to focus on blame.
- In addition to the tragic things they see, help children identify good things, such as heroic actions, families who unite and share support, and the assistance offered by people throughout the community.

When Talking Isn't Enough

For some children more active interventions may be required, particularly if they were more directly affected by the traumatic event.

- The family, as a unit, might consider counseling. Traumatic events often reawaken a child's fear of loss of parents (frequently a child's greatest fear) at a time when parents may be preoccupied with their own practical and emotional difficulties.
- Families may choose to permit temporary regressive behavior. Several arrangements may help children separate gradually after the agreed-upon time limit: spending extra time with parents immediately before bedtime, leaving the child's bedroom door slightly ajar, and using a nightlight.
- Many parents have their own fears of leaving a child alone after a traumatic event or other fears they may be unable to acknowledge. Parents often are more able to seek help on the children's behalf and may, in fact, use the children's problems as a way of asking for help for themselves and other family members.
- Teachers also can help children with art and play activities, as well as by encouraging group discussions in the classroom and informational presentations about the traumatic event.

Note: Some of the information in this brochure was gathered from a brochure developed by Project Heartland – a project of the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services in response to the 1995 bombing of the Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City. Project Heartland was developed with funds from the Federal Emergency Management Agency in consultation with the Federal Center for Mental Health Services.



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 will 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 disaster 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 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:

- 4 Be truthful and share information in a developmentally appropriate way.
- 4 Discourage discussion about details of any death or disturbing aspects of the event.
- 4 Provide a timeline of upcoming school activities (clearing of debris, removal of memorial displays, rebuilding efforts).
- 4 Work with the students in planning memorial tributes or displays. Inform them about any applicable school procedures or restrictions.
- 4 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, 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. 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 has 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: 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 hear such concerns, report the matter to administration.

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 (see the Information on Coping section).

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, can comfort those at the school and encourage them to seek guidance 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. Consider passing out the handouts on coping.

PFA-S Core Action 8: Link with Collaborative Services

Provide Information on Available Services: 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.

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