

PROVIDING PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID (PFA): PART 1

A POTENTIALLY HELPFUL MODEL

The Bottom Line

Service providers, teachers, and caregivers can recognize symptoms of psychological discomfort and perform PFA as an acute intervention for the alleviation of stress for youth. The Listen, Protect, Connect, and Teach model is one example of PFA most commonly used by teachers but is applicable for all service providers. There are many more detailed resources available.

Listen

Acknowledge the child's feelings and allow them to discuss their worry, anxiety, fear, and other concerns. Be sure to establish trust and convey interest and empathy in what they have to say.

- Ensure the child knows that when they are ready to share, you are ready to listen.
- Inquire into how the child feels and how they might need you to help them.

Protect

Re-establish feelings of physical and emotional safety through routine communication and avoidance of re-traumatization.

- Offer information about what is being done in the child's school and community to keep everyone safe.
- Provide a calm regular routine to establish normalcy.
- Have regular conversations with the child about their worries and concerns.



Connect

A common reaction to trauma or fear is emotional and social isolation and perceived loss of social support. Support students in staying connected to peers even in an online learning environment to promote stability, recovery, and predictability in their lives.

- Talk about some of the things that might be helpful in supporting re-connection with friends and family.
- Ask them what has been helpful to them in the past when they have faced a crisis.
- Invite scenarios that offer routine, as well as scheduled things to look forward to.

Model

Teachers and support workers may not know the exact recovery process after a traumatic event, but they can acknowledge the disruption to school and many other aspects of daily life. Modelling an optimistic and positive approach can show children that adults can cope with this stress, despite the anxiety they may be experiencing.

- Brainstorm coping strategies together. Share personal experiences of how you have coped.
- Thank the child for having courage to share their concerns with someone.

Teach

Informed helping professionals can help educators and students become familiar with the range of normal reactions that may occur due to a traumatic event and discuss beneficial ways of adapting to new challenges and changes.

- Establish a regular routine, especially on school days (e.g., regular bedtimes and meal hours, not engaging in social media during ‘school’ hours, etc.).
- Provide reassurance that youth may have a range of feelings during stressful times or after a traumatic event, and that this is normal. Inquire into any changes in behaviour to assess for any risk.

For original sources and documents, please visit: www.childtraumaresearch.ca