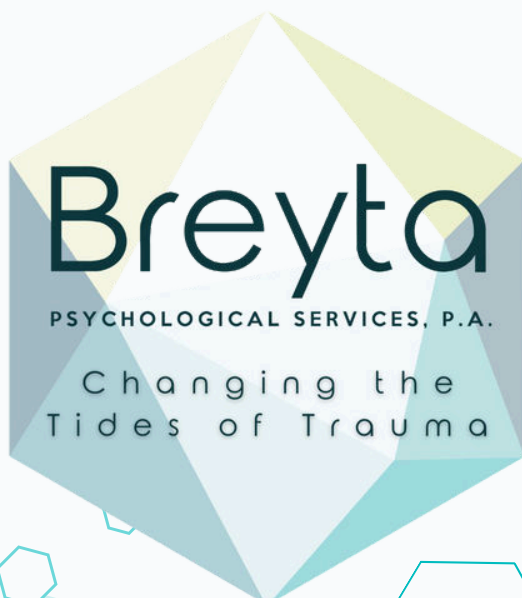


# A Simple Guide to Offering Psychological First Aid

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# Looking to Help During Tough Times? Here's How to Offer Support!

It's heartening when we feel the desire to help those around us in times of need. It's completely normal to wonder what to do or say in such moments—that uncertainty only shows how deeply you care. Your willingness to show up for others speaks volumes, and this guide will help you offer that care with confidence and compassion.

In moments of crisis, reaching out to support others can make a meaningful difference. Offering care requires empathy and intention, especially when emotions are high and situations feel overwhelming. Psychological First Aid (PFA) is one of the most effective ways to provide immediate support. This guide will help you offer care with compassion and confidence, making you a steady presence during difficult times.



# Overview of Psychological First Aid



Psychological First Aid (PFA) is a simple and accessible way to offer immediate support in the aftermath of a disaster or crisis. It helps promote safety, calm, and connection, addressing people's basic emotional and practical needs without requiring formal therapy. But what if you're unsure how to offer help or don't know where to start? No problem! PFA is designed to be easy to learn, and this guide will walk you through the key steps, helping you provide support that can make a real difference during difficult times.



1

**ENSURE SAFETY**



2

**PROMOTE CALM**



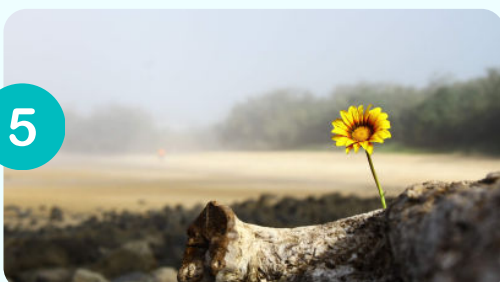
3

**CREATE CONNECTION**



4

**PROVIDE PRACTICAL ASSISTANCE**



5

**FOSTER HOPE & STRENGTH**

# PFA Overview

## Background on the Approach

When disaster strikes, many of us feel uncertain about how to help those affected. Psychological First Aid (PFA) offers a clear and compassionate way to provide immediate emotional and practical support.



### 1 Anyone Can Do It

You don't need to be a therapist to offer PFA—simply understanding how to be present and offer care in these moments can make a powerful difference. PFA offers clear guidelines so that you can learn quickly and easily.

### 2 It Works

PFA was developed by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) and the National Center for PTSD (NCPTSD) to support individuals facing trauma after disasters. It's an evidence-based approach.

### 3 It is NOT therapy and It is NOT About Forcing Conversation

PFA is about offering immediate emotional and practical support, not about providing therapy or deep processing of trauma. Give people the space to share if and when they're ready.

### 4 Free Training and Resources

If you'd like to learn more about providing PFA, you can take free online training through the National Child Traumatic Stress Network. This course will provide you with a deeper understanding of how to offer compassionate, trauma-informed support in disaster situations.

National Child Traumatic Stress Network - Free PFA Training  
<https://learn.nctsn.org/enrol/index.php?id=596>



# PFA History

## Origins of the Concept

When disaster strikes, many of us feel uncertain about how to help those affected. Psychological First Aid (PFA) offers a clear and compassionate way to provide immediate emotional and practical support.



### 1 PFA Use

Psychological First Aid (PFA) is an evidence-based approach designed to support individuals—children, adolescents, adults, and families—immediately following a disaster or traumatic event. Developed by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network and the National Center for PTSD, PFA helps reduce distress and promote adaptive coping without assuming long-term mental health issues will develop. It acknowledges that survivors may experience a range of physical, emotional, and behavioral reactions, and provides flexible support to meet diverse needs in settings like shelters, hospitals, and crisis centers.

### 2 It is NOT therapy and It is NOT About Forcing Conversation

PFA actually consists of eight components: Contact and Engagement, Safety and Comfort, Stabilization, Information Gathering, Practical Assistance, Social Support, Information on Coping, and Linkage to Services. We've distilled the concepts into a shorter list to help familiarize people quickly with the approach. Our goal is to provide an accessible introduction.

### 3 Disclaimer

This guide is intended as a brief introduction to Psychological First Aid and should not replace formal training. While it may provide useful tools for offering immediate support, we recommend completing a full PFA course to gain a deeper understanding of how to effectively respond in crisis situations. This document is not a substitute for professional mental health services or formal PFA training. All individuals are encouraged to seek proper training and certifications when possible. For formal training and more detailed information, visit the [National Child Traumatic Stress Network's PFA resource page](#).

PFA centers on five key actions to help stabilize and support individuals in the aftermath of a disaster. These steps acknowledge the importance of honoring each person's unique experience, perspective, and emotional response.

## 1. ENSURE SAFETY

- **What to do:** Help people find safety and meet immediate needs for food, water, and shelter. Gently guide them to a calm space if necessary.
- **Trauma-sensitive approach:** Always ask permission before offering physical assistance. Each person may respond differently to stress, and respecting their autonomy can create a greater sense of safety.
- **Example:** "Is there anything I can do to help you feel safe right now? Would you like me to help you move to a quieter space?"

## 2. PROMOTE CALM

- **What to do:** Use a gentle, reassuring voice. Offer grounding techniques like slow, deep breathing if someone is feeling overwhelmed. Avoid pushing them to talk about the trauma; just be present to listen if they choose to share.
- **Respect different ways of coping:** Everyone expresses distress differently. Some may be more reserved, while others may be outwardly emotional. Meet people where they are without judgment.
- **Example:** "It's okay if you don't feel like talking right now. I'm here if you need me."

## 3. CREATE CONNECTION

- **What to do:** Help survivors reconnect with loved ones or their community, offering practical help like making phone calls or locating resources.
- **Offer choice and control:** Allow individuals to make decisions about what help they need to regain a sense of agency during a chaotic time.
- **Example:** "Would you like help finding your family, or is there something else that would be more helpful for you?"

# Psychological First Aid Continued

PFA centers on five key actions to help stabilize and support individuals in the aftermath of a disaster. These steps acknowledge the importance of honoring each person's unique experience, perspective, and emotional response.

## 4. PROVIDE PRACTICAL ASSISTANCE

- **What to do:** Ask how you can assist with immediate needs such as finding shelter, transportation, or connecting with services. Be clear and straightforward about available resources.
- **Acknowledge different preferences:** Some people may hesitate to ask for help, so offer support in a respectful, non-imposing way.
- **Example:** “Is there anything specific I can help you with right now? Let me know what would be most helpful for you.”

## 5. FOSTER HOPE AND STRENGTH

- **What to do:** Remind survivors of their strengths and the steps they've already taken to cope. Offer reassurance that while recovery is difficult, it is possible, one step at a time.
- **Honor individual values:** Different people find strength in different places, such as family, faith, or personal resilience. Recognize and reinforce whatever helps them feel grounded.
- **Example:** “You've been through so much already, and I see the strength you're showing now. What's one small thing we can focus on together to help you feel more in control?”

## CITATIONS:

National Child Traumatic Stress Network, & National Center for PTSD. (2006). *Psychological first aid: Field operations guide (2nd ed.)*. U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/psychological-first-aid-pfa-field-operations-guide-2nd-edition>



Have any questions? Reach out at [care@breytapsych.com](mailto:care@breytapsych.com).

# Additional Considerations

When offering PFA, it's essential to acknowledge that everyone processes trauma differently. By doing so, you provide help and also preserve dignity and a sense of agency, fostering trust and safety during a vulnerable time.

## RESPECT PERSONAL BOUNDARIES

- Each person's comfort with physical proximity and assistance will vary. Always ask before offering physical contact or stepping closer.
- Example: "Would you prefer to have some space right now, or would it help if someone stayed with you?"

## BE MINDFUL OF EYE CONTACT

- Not everyone is comfortable with direct eye contact, especially in times of stress. Some may avoid it out of respect or personal coping. Follow their cues and adjust accordingly.

## USE CLEAR, SIMPLE LANGUAGE

- In a crisis, clear and compassionate language helps reduce confusion. Avoid jargon and speak in a calm, direct manner.
- Example: "I'm here to help you find a safe place or food if you need it. Would that be helpful?"

## ASK, DON'T ASSUME

- Each person's needs are different, and it's important to ask how you can be of help rather than assuming what they need.
- Example: "What would be most helpful for you right now?"

## ACKNOWLEDGE AND VALIDATE EMOTIONS

- Different people express emotions in different ways. Validate their feelings without judgment, whether they express them openly or quietly.
- Example: "It's okay to feel however you're feeling. There's no right or wrong way to respond to this."





WE DON'T HAVE TO DO ALL  
OF IT ALONE. WE WERE  
NEVER MEANT TO.

Brené Brown