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Chicago Dept of Public Health



OFFICE OF VIOLENCE PREVENTION

# Violence Prevention E-Brief

## Psychological First Aid—Supporting Well-Being During Difficult Times

According to the International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies, right now psychological first aid is the intervention of choice. There are many families in Chicago today living with violence, loss, and poverty as well as other 'stress and distress' factors. Just as we know what first aid to give for a cut or a burn, so too every adult should be equipped and prepared to offer those around them psychological first aid, particularly children. This means effective communication and education strategies to protect from further harm, the reduction of physiological arousal and the provision of emergency stabilization and safety planning.

**Psychological First Aid creates and sustains an environment of safety, calming, connectedness to others, self-efficacy – the “I can do” attitude and hopefulness.**

[http://www.jhsph.edu/preparedness/training/online/dis\\_mtl\\_hlth\\_comp.html](http://www.jhsph.edu/preparedness/training/online/dis_mtl_hlth_comp.html)  
<http://www.google.com/searchhl=en&q=psychological+first+aid+Pynoos>

### Tool Box for Responding to Stressed/Distressed People

Adapted from Pynoos RS, Nader K (1988)

#### When trauma generates:

- helplessness
- fear
- passivity
- cognitive confusion
- lack of ability to verbalize
- sleep disturbances
- anxieties about death
- feeling overwhelmed
- impaired concentration and learning
- inconsistent behavior
- abrupt shifts in relationships
- concern about others' safety
- feeling disturbed, guilty, angry, frightened by one's grief

#### Psychological First Aid Response :

**Provide support**, rest, comfort, food, the opportunity to play or draw

**Re-establish the adult protective shield** for children; re-establish caring relationships with other adults

Be willing to **repeat clarifications**; anticipate confusion; it's hard to listen under stress

**Provide emotional labels**– words– to describe feelings

**Maintain consistency** where possible in life-in parenting, in scheduling, in self-care rituals; regular eating, sleeping, bathing, playing

**Encourage** talking about the event(s)

Assume that **everyone is doing their very best** to cope with whatever has happened

**Reassure** with realistic information

**Help** to keep positive memories alive

*Always kiss your children goodnight - even if they're already asleep. ~H. J. Brown*