

Psychological First Aid 06: Connection with Social Supports

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Connection with Social Supports

Linking them with social resources

In the Connection with Social Supports stage of Psychological First Aid (PFA), the aim is to link survivors with social resources and establish connections with primary support persons and other sources of support. This stage focuses on providing immediate emotional support and facilitating access to social networks, including family members, friends, and community helping resources.

Information on Coping Support: Providing coping strategies

In the Information on Coping Support stage of Psychological First Aid (PFA), the goal is to provide information about stress reactions and coping strategies to reduce distress and promote adaptive functioning. This stage is crucial for helping survivors manage their stress reactions and deal more effectively with problems after a disaster.

Here are some key points about this stage:

Common Stress Reactions

- As a PFA provider, you should briefly discuss common stress reactions experienced by survivors. These reactions may include distressing thoughts, mental images of the traumatic event, dreams related to what happened, and upsetting emotional or physical **reactions triggered** by reminders of the experience.
- It's essential to avoid pathologizing survivor responses by using terms like "symptoms" or "disorder." Instead, emphasize that these reactions are understandable and expectable.
- Some survivors may also experience positive reactions, such as appreciating life, family, friends, or strengthening spiritual beliefs and social connections.

Ways of Coping

- Provide basic information on effective coping strategies for post-disaster reactions and adversity.
- Adaptive coping actions help reduce anxiety, lessen distressing reactions, improve the situation, or help people get through difficult times.

- Encourage survivors to explore various coping mechanisms that work best for them. These may include seeking social support, practising relaxation techniques, engaging in physical activity, maintaining routines, and finding healthy distractions.

Avoid Blanket Reassurance

While it's helpful to describe common stress reactions and note that intense reactions are common but often diminish over time, avoid providing "blanket" reassurance that stress reactions will disappear. Unrealistic expectations about recovery time can be detrimental.

Linkage with Collaborative Services

As part of this stage, consider linking survivors with available services needed at the time or in the future. Collaborative services may include mental health support, community resources, or other relevant assistance.

References

Main source document – US Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Veterans Health Administration, Office of Mental Health Services. Psychological First Aid: Field Operations Guide.

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