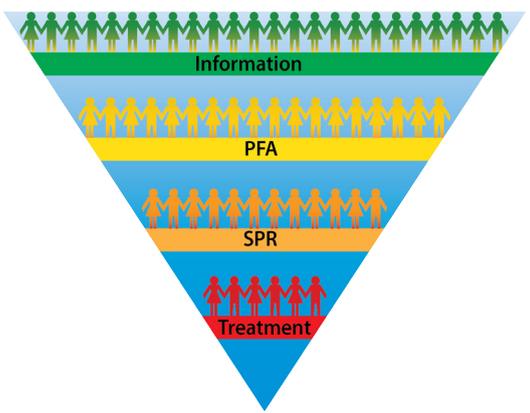


# The 'Stepped-Care' Approach

Not everyone needs the same amount of help after a disaster or emergency. Many people recover without help. Experts agree that a 'stepped-care' approach is best.

## This means:

1. Everyone affected by a disaster or emergency will need information in the immediate hours, days, and weeks after an event.
2. Many people will need Psychological First Aid (PFA) in the hours, days, and weeks after an event.
3. Some people will have stress and difficulties that continue in the weeks or months after an event. This doesn't mean they have a mental health problem. For most people action-oriented support such as Skills for Psychological Recovery (SPR) may be all the help they need to recover.
4. A few people will need professional mental health treatment for problems such as, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Usually only a small percentage of people fall into this category after a disaster or emergency.



# Additional Resources

## Mobile Apps

- **Psychological First Aid Mobile App**  
*National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) & National Center for PTSD*

**Description:**  
After disasters or emergencies, the PFA Mobile™ app can help responders who offer Psychological First Aid (PFA) to adults, families, and children.

**Link**  
[www.nctsn.org/content/pfa-mobile](http://www.nctsn.org/content/pfa-mobile)

- **Psychological First Aid (PFA) Tutorial**  
*University of Minnesota*

**Description:**  
This Psychological First Aid (PFA) Tutorial has a quick and thorough review for those who've previously received training in PFA

**Link**  
[www.sph.umn.edu/ce/perl/mobile/pfatutorial/](http://www.sph.umn.edu/ce/perl/mobile/pfatutorial/)

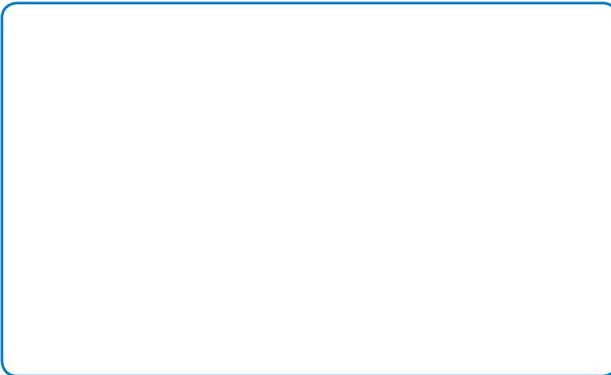
- **Mindfulness Coach**  
*National Center for PTSD*

**Description:**  
Practicing mindfulness means grounding yourself in the present moment. Mindfulness has been shown to help reduce stress and coping with unpleasant thoughts and emotions.

**Link**  
[www.ptsd.va.gov/public/materials/apps/mobileapp\\_mindfulness\\_coach.asp](http://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/materials/apps/mobileapp_mindfulness_coach.asp)

## Acknowledgements

*Psychological First Aid—After a Disaster or Emergency* Brochure has been adapted from *Psychological first aid: Facilitator's Manual for Orienting Field Workers* (World Health Organization 2013), *Psychological First Aid Field Operations Manual 2nd Edition* (National Center for PTSD and National Child Traumatic Stress Network, 2010).



For 24/7 Health Advice call:  
**HEALTHLink Alberta**  
1-866-408-5465  
(LINK)



For more information about Psychological First Aid (PFA) visit: [www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org)



To request additional copies of this resource email:  
[HPDIP.MH.EarlyID@albertahealthservices.ca](mailto:HPDIP.MH.EarlyID@albertahealthservices.ca)

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# Psychological First Aid



## After a Disaster or Emergency



**FACT:** Most people don't develop a serious mental health problem after a disaster or emergency.

**FACT:** Even though people can have strong reactions after a disaster or emergency, most people recover on their own.

Research shows that people recover better after a disaster if they feel safe and connected to other people; if they have social, physical and emotional support; and if they feel like they can help themselves and their community.

## What is Psychological First Aid (PFA)?

Psychological First Aid (PFA) is a way of helping people immediately after a disaster or emergency. PFA providers give practical support in a way that respects the person's dignity, culture, and abilities. PFA providers must take care for their own well-being first so they can be helpful to others.

### PFA involves:

- Offering practical care and support without forcing it on people.
- Helping people meet their basic needs (e.g., for food, water, information).
- Listening to people, but not pressuring them to talk.
- Comforting people and helping them to feel calm.
- Connecting people to information, community services, and social supports.
- Protecting people from further immediate harm.

## Who is PFA for?

You can offer PFA to children, adolescents, parents, families, and adults who have been through a disaster or emergency. Not everyone will want or need help after a disaster. You can also give PFA to first responders and other disaster relief workers.

## Who can provide PFA?

Both professionals and community members can provide PFA. You may even need to help your friends, family, colleagues, or neighbours after a disaster or emergency. By learning PFA, you will build the skills you need to provide that support. You don't need to have formal healthcare training (e.g., psychology, social work, counselling, nursing).

## The 4 main actions in PFA

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| <b>Prepare</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Learn about the traumatic event.</li><li>• Learn about available services and supports.</li><li>• Learn about safety and security concerns.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Look</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Observe for safety.</li><li>• Observe for people with obvious urgent basic needs.</li><li>• Observe for people with serious distress reactions.</li></ul>   |
| <b>Listen</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make contact with people who may need support.</li><li>• Ask about people's needs and concerns.</li><li>• Listen to people and help them feel calm.</li></ul>                                     |
| <b>Link</b>    | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Help people address basic needs and access services.</li><li>• Help people cope with problems.</li><li>• Give information.</li><li>• Connect people with loved ones and social support.</li></ul> |

Updated from:

*Psychological first aid: Facilitator's Manual for Orienting Field Workers* (World Health Organization 2013)

## What PFA isn't:

- It's not something that only professionals can do.
- It's not professional counselling or therapy.
- It's not asking someone to analyse what happened to them or discuss the event in detail.
- It's not pressuring anyone to talk to you.
- It's not something that everybody will need or want.

## There are some cases where PFA isn't appropriate:

- People with serious, life-threatening injuries who need emergency medical care.
- People who are so upset they cannot care for themselves or their children.
- People who may hurt themselves or may hurt others.