Keeping the School Family Safe in the Midst of Traumatic Experiences
Objectives

• Introducing the concept of Psychological First Aid and its application in the school setting
• Overview of the effects of trauma and exposure to trauma on physical and mental health
• Familiarize with specific PFA Model
Importance of Connection
What is the #1 cause of death in USA?

But no one noticed.
We Are Hardwired for Connection
Psychological First Aid (PFA)

• Making connections
• Helping people feel safe
• Being kind, calm and compassionate
• Meeting people’s basic needs
• Listening
• Encouraging good coping

• Helping people connect to services
• Giving accurate and timely information
• Making a referral to a Disaster Mental Health
• Ending conversation, closure

Taking Care of Yourself!
R.A.P.I.D. PFA
Impact of Stress on the Body

- **headaches**: Stress can trigger and intensify tension headaches.
- **heartburn**: Stress increases the production of stomach acid, which could lead to heartburn or make it worse.
- **rapid breathing**: When you're stressed, the muscles that help you breathe tense up, which can leave you short of breath.
- **risk of heart attack**: Over time, an increased heart rate and high blood pressure damage your arteries, which could lead to a heart attack.
- **pounding heart**: Stress hormones make your heart pump faster so that blood can quickly reach your vital organs and limbs.
- **increased depression**: Chronic stress can wear you down emotionally and lead to depression.
- **insomnia**: Stress makes it harder to fall asleep and stay asleep, which can lead to insomnia.
- **weakened immune system**: Long-term stress weakens your immune system's defenses, leaving you more vulnerable to infections.
- **high blood sugar**: Stress causes your liver to release extra sugar (glucose) into your bloodstream, which over time puts you at risk for type 2 diabetes.
- **high blood pressure**: Stress hormones tighten blood vessels, which can raise your blood pressure.
Impact of Stress on Children

• Problems sleeping
• Not eating
• Separation anxiety
• Being scared at new experiences
• Cranky behaviors
• More stubborn
• Bedwetting

• Hitting others
• Carried all the time
• Violent play
• Moody, depressed or irritable
• Clinginess to adults, caregivers
• Anxiety, worry
Window of Tolerance

Hyperarousal-anxious, angry, out of control, overwhelmed, Fight or Flight, not a choice-reactions take over

---

Increased stress- more anxious, agitated

Window of Tolerance- you feel as if you can deal with whatever is happening in life. IDEAL PLACE, CALM, ALERT and FEELS SAFE

Increased stress- depressed, spacey

---

Hypoarousal- FROZEN, spacey, zoned out, Body wants to shut down. Not a choice-Reactions take over
Window of Tolerance (in some cases)
Additional Factors

- Physical symptoms (hungry/tired)
- Unexpected situations in your day
- Multiplicity of situations
- Deadlines
- Age
- External resources
Awareness of Triggers

Significance

Time length

Cumulative

Multiplicity
Trauma

- **Conscious Discipline Comprehensive Definition**: The unique individual experience of a single event, series of events, or set of enduring conditions, in which…
- An individual’s ability to integrate his or her emotional experience is **overwhelmed**
- The individual experiences a threat to life, bodily integrity or sanity
A Trauma Exposed Response

• Transformation that takes place within us as a result of exposure to the suffering of other living beings or the planet. (van Dernoot Lipsky, 2009)
  • Individual
  • Organizational
  • Societal
Trauma Exposed Response

- Feeling helpless, hopeless
- Sense that one can never do enough
- Hypervigilance
- Diminished creativity
- Inability to embrace complexity
- Minimizing
- Chronic exhaustion/physical ailments
- Inability to listen/deliberate avoidance
- Dissociative moments
- Sense of persecution
- Guilt
- Fear
- Anger, cynicism
- Inability to empathize, numbing
- Addictions
- An inflated sense of importance related to one’s work
Factors That Influence Stress Response

• Social support
• Hardiness & optimism
• Sensation seeking
• Autonomic reactivity
Major Factors

• Changing your view or perception about stress.
• Stress makes you more social.
Body Scan Meditation
“[PFA] It is the description of a humane, supportive response to a fellow human being who is suffering and who may need support.”

The National Institute of Mental Health
Goal of RAPID PFA

• Create a sense of safety; offer basic needs
• Offer a calm, safe environment to share
• Build a connection and trust
• Create hope
• Connect to resources
RAPID PFA

Rapport  Assessment  Prioritization  Intervention  Disposition
Psychological First Aid – What is it?

- Non intrusive
- Practical
- Support
- Assessment of needs and concerns
- Linking to resources (basic needs)
- Listening
- Comfort
- No pressure to share/talk
- Download calm
- Connect to information
- Connect to services
- Connect to social support
- Protecting people from further harm
Psychological First Aid – What it is NOT

• NOT only for professional mental health staff
• NOT professional counselling
• NOT clinical or psychiatric intervention; No diagnosis or treatment
• NOT asking people to analyze what happened or put time and events in order
• NOT pressuring people to tell you their story, or asking details about how they feel or what happened
History

• Long history of support after natural disasters, catastrophes or wartime
• Rooted in crisis response from WWI
• RAPID PFA is a result of studies from the Gulf War around 1992
• Nontraditional approach to recognition and intervention to address the stigma of seeking mental health services and limited number of trained trauma-informed clinicians
Rapport
Establishing a RAPPORT and Reflective Listening
Establishing a RAPPORT and Reflective Listening

• Compassionate presence
• Body language
• Minimize interruptions
• Avoid “why?” and “why not?”
• Do not judge
• Avoid evaluation of their experience and reactions
PFA Tips to Building Rapport

• Avoid asking in-depth description of traumatic event; avoid pressing for details
• Instead use non-language words (Uh-huh, hmm, I see, etc)
• Follow the lead of the individual; go at their pace
• Restate or repeat back to the person their own words
• Summary phrases (DNA method)
Active Listening Activity
Emotions are Contagious
Assessment
It’s Not About the Nail
What can you tell from This Picture?
SURVIVOR’S STORY

What happened?  What was their reaction to the event?
Perspectives...
KEY POINT

Focus: Evidence of impairment or dysfunction/assessing basic physical-psychological needs
Screening-3 Questions

• Is there any evidence that this person needs assistance?

• Is there any evidence that this person’s ability to adaptively function and attend to her necessary responsibilities is being, or may be compromised?

• Is further exploration into person’s capacity to function warranted (mental and behavioral)?

• You can draw inferences from these domains: Integrity of Physical Health, Physical safety, Psychobiological distress, Cognitive and intellectual functioning, affective and behavioral expressions, Interpersonal resources and Material resources.
Appraisal

• To what extent is there any evidence that this person needs assistance?
• To what extent is there any evidence that this person’s ability to function is compromised?
Prioritization
Maslow’s Hierarchy

- Physiological
- Safety
- Love/belonging
- Esteem
- Self-actualization
The Crisis Triad
ABC Model
Intervention
When Listening is NOT Enough…

- Explanatory & anticipatory guidance
- Cognitive reframing
- Stress management
- Instillation of future hope
- Enlisting support of family and friends
- Delay making life altering decisions/changes
- Faith-based intervention
Explanatory & Anticipatory Guidance

• Explanatory Guidance-
  • What happened?
  • Why did it happened?
  • What reactions are common?
  • Otherwise, people will try to answer their own questions

• Anticipatory Guidance
Cognitive Reframing

THOUGHTS

ACTIONS

FEELINGS
Survivors’ Themes…

- Pathologizing
- Guilt/blame
- Survivor guilt
- Incidents that violate one’s belief in a just/fair world
- Betrayal of trust
- Vicarious personal identification with terrible event or person
Stress Management

• Remember that the concept of **EMOTIONS ARE CONTAGIOUS**

• Stress management (sleep, nutrition, relaxation via breathing, exercise) - **THREAD CAREFULLY!**

• Individualize
How

• Tells the story over and over
• Acts out what happened
• Regression
• Doesn’t want to be alone or away from parents
• Feels physically sick
• Listen to the child re-telling the story. At the end of the story, ask them who came to help and when the child knew he/she was safe. This ensures that they are not emotionally left in the scariest part of the story, but instead ends the story at a safe place.
• Let the child play “pretend” about the trauma. Help the child end the play in a safe way by asking “how can the toys feel safe” or by asking “who is helping the toys now”.
Disposition
• Referral
• Liaison
• Advocacy
~~Referral~~  ~~Liaison~~  ~~Advocacy~~
Where do we go from here?
Focus

- Wrapping up the Interaction
- Plan Following Steps
Psychological First Aid for Schools

- PFA-S designed to reduce the distress caused by emergencies
- Promotes short term and long term coping
- Schools are typically the first resource for families and the first service to re-open after a disaster
- Emergency planning is critical in school setting
- Emergencies impact students’ learning and social interactions
- Trauma-related stress can have long-term impact on children if left untreated
- Effective interventions can be brief
- Teachers, school nurses, family support and program management can all implement PFA-S
References


• Sandy Hook Promise: https://www.sandyhookpromise.org/

• Head Start ECLKC: https://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/

• The National Child Traumatic Stress Network: https://www.nctsn.org/treatments-and-practices

• The American Institute of Stress: https://www.stress.org/

• Conscious Discipline: https://consciousdiscipline.com/

• Aces Connection: https://www.acesconnection.com/

• Emotions Are Contagious: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cef35Fk7YD8