

General Emotional First Aid

Emotional First Aid: A set of *life skills* used by *lay citizens* and *emergency responders* to provide the support a person who is *emotionally* shocked needs *immediately* following a crisis event.

How to Help the Emotionally Injured After Tragedy Strikes

1. Reach Out Physically

- Position yourself at the victims side and at his level
- Touch - unless the victim pulls away
- Use a soft voice
- Use the victim's name

2. Reach Out Emotionally

- Ask the victim how he is feeling
- Acknowledge the victim's experience
- Don't minimize the victim's experience (i.e., "You'll be O.K.")

3. Don't Overlook the Quiet Victims

- Many victims after a tragic event are stunned and may appear unaffected. Remember that many people can be affected by a tragic event - witnesses, rescuers, children . . .
- Don't overlook these "invisible victims"
- When you suspect someone is affected by a tragic event, reach out with Caring Curiosity — "How are you?"

4. Protect the victim from making impulsive decisions. Most major decisions can wait until the victim is thinking clearly.

- Protect the victims from being victimized by others who may not have the best interest of the victim in mind.
- Provide for the victim's physical needs - food, medicine, safe place . . .

5. Reassure: Many victims have an urgent need for information after a tragic event — "What happened?"; "Why?" Assist the victim in getting the information he needs. The victim may need an Information Advocate.

- Victims often blame themselves for the crisis event. Help a guilty victim gain perspective by asking him to tell you the "whole story."
- Try to gently point out to the victim what he did right before, during, or after the tragic event.

6. Organize: Victims are often paralyzed after a tragic event and often lose their capacity to deal with all of the new demands created by the tragedy. Assist the victim in developing a simple plan. Suggest — “Let’s focus on what needs to be done now.”

7. Reinforce the actions which the victim is taking or wants to take to emotionally survive the tragic event. The victim will struggle to find something or someone to hold onto in the first few hours. You may need to “clear the way” so that what the victim wants to do he is able to do.

8. Summary: In the first few hours after a tragic event, the victim is often surrounded by people who have “a job to do” or who have opinions about what the victim should or shouldn’t do. The primary goal of the person providing Emotional First Aid is to enable the victim to act according to his wishes, values, and beliefs and not according to what others think should be done.

- Do not “overcare” or do too much for the victim. Remember that the primary psychological challenge for the victim is to regain a sense of control. Therefore, the victim should be encouraged to make decisions and take action in his own behalf.
- Finally, a broken heart cannot “be fixed.” Don’t try! A caring presence is what you can offer to someone who is emotionally devastated. Just being there is very powerful and will be experienced by the victim as very helpful.

What To Say

- “What happened?”
- “I’m so sorry”
- “This must be very difficult for you”
- “It’s O.K. to feel . . . ”
- “I don’t know what to say”

What Not To Say

- “I know how you feel”
- “Calm down”
- “Don’t cry”
- “It could be worse”
- “God has his reasons”