

Psychological First Aid

NCTSN



The National Child
Traumatic Stress Network

Symptoms and Psychological First Aid

Preschool through Second Grade

Response to Trauma	First Aid
1) Helplessness and passivity	1) Provide support, rest, comfort, food, opportunity to play or draw
2) Generalized fear	2) Reestablish adult protective shield
3) Cognitive confusion (e.g. do not understand that the danger is over)	3) Give repeated concrete clarifications for anticipated confusions.
4) Difficulty identifying what is bothering them.	4) Provide emotional labels for common reactions
5) Lack for verbalization – selective mutism, repetitive nonverbal traumatic play, unvoiced questions	5) Help to verbalize general feelings and complaints (so they will not feel alone with their feelings)
6) Attributing magical qualities to traumatic reminders	6) Separate what happened from physical reminders (e.g., a house, monkey-bars, parking lot)

Adapted from: Pynoos RS, Nader K: (1988) Psychological first aid and treatment approach to children exposed to community violence: Research implications. Journal of Traumatic Stress 1: 445-473.

Symptoms and Psychological First Aid Preschool through Second Grade

Response to Trauma	First Aid
7) Sleep disturbances (night terrors and nightmares, fear of going to sleep, fear of being alone, especially at night).	7) Encourage them to let their parents and teachers know.
8) Anxious attachment (clinging, not wanting to be away from parent, worrying about when parent is coming back, etc.)	8) Provide consistent caretaking (e.g. assurance of being picked up from school, knowledge of caretaker's whereabouts).
9) Cognitive confusion (e.g. do not understand that the danger is over)	9) Tolerate regressive symptoms in a time-limited manner.
10) Anxieties related to incomplete understanding about death: fantasies of "fixing up" the dead: expectations that a dead person will return, e.g., an assailant.	10) Give explanations about the physical reality of death.

Adapted from: Pynoos RS, Nader K: (1988) Psychological first aid and treatment approach to children exposed to community violence: Research implications. *Journal of Traumatic Stress* 1: 445-473.

Symptoms and Psychological First Aid

Third through Fifth Grade

Response to Trauma	First Aid
1) Preoccupation with their own actions during the event: issues of responsibility and guilt	1) Help to express their secretive imaginings about the event.
2) Specific fears, triggered by traumatic reminders	2) Help to identify and articulate traumatic reminders and anxieties; encourage them not to generalize
3) Retelling and replaying of the event (traumatic play)	3) Permit them to talk and act it out; address distortions, and acknowledge normality of feelings and reactions.
4) Fear of being overwhelmed by their feelings (of crying, of being angry)	4) Encourage expression of fear, anger, sadness, in your supportive presence

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Symptoms and Psychological First Aid

Third through Fifth Grade

Response to Trauma	First Aid
5) Impaired concentration and learning	5) Encourage to let teachers know when thoughts and feeling interfere with learning.
6) Sleep disturbances (bad dreams, fear of sleeping alone)	6) Support them in reporting dreams, provide information about why we have bad dreams.
7) Concerns about their own and other's safety	7) Help to share worries; reassurance with realistic information.
8) Altered and inconsistent behavior (e.g. unusually aggressive or reckless behavior, inhibitions)	8) Help to cope with the challenge to their own impulse control (e.g. acknowledge "It must be hard to feel so angry")

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Symptoms and Psychological First Aid

Third through Fifth Grade

Response to Trauma	First Aid
9) Somatic complaints	9) Somatic complaints
10) Hesitation to disturb parent with own anxieties	10) Offer to meet with children and parent(s) to help children let parents know how they are feeling.
11) Concern for other victims and their families	11) Encourage constructive activities on behalf of the injured or deceased.
12) Feeling disturbed, confused, and frightened by their grief responses, fear of ghosts	12) Help to retain positive memories as they work through the more intrusive traumatic memories

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Symptoms and Psychological First Aid Adolescents (Sixth Grade and Up)

Response to Trauma	First Aid
1) Detachment, shame, and guilt (similar to adult response)	1) Encourage discussion of the event, feelings about it, and realistic expectations of what could have been done.
2) Self-consciousness about their fears, sense of vulnerability, and other emotional responses; fear of being labeled abnormal	2) Help them understand the adult nature of these feelings; encourage peer understanding and support
3) Post-traumatic acting out behavior, e.g drug use, delinquent behavior, sexual acting out	3) Help to understand the acting out behavior as an effort to numb their responses to, or to voice their anger over, the event.
4) Life threatening reenactment; self-destructive or accident-prone behavior	4) Address the impulse toward reckless behavior in the acute aftermath; link it to the challenge to impulse control associated with violence.

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Symptoms and Psychological First Aid Adolescents (Sixth Grade and Up)

Response to Trauma	First Aid
5) Abrupt shifts in interpersonal relationships	5) Discuss the expectable strain on relationships with family and peers
6) Desires and plans to take revenge	6) Elicit their actual plans of revenge; address the realistic consequences of these actions; encourage constructive alternatives that lessen the traumatic sense of helplessness
7) Radical changes in life attitudes, which influence identity formations	7) Link attitude changes to the event's impact
8) Premature entrance into adulthood (e.g., leaving school or getting married), or reluctance to leave home	8) Encourage postponing radical decisions in order to allow time to work through their responses to the event and to grieve.

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Initial Consultation

First Stage: Opening

- A. Establish the focus
- B. Free drawing and storytelling
- C. Traumatic reference

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Initial Consultation

Second Stage: Trauma

- A. Reliving the experience
 - Emotional release
 - Reconstruction
 - Perceptual experience
 - Special detailing
 - Worst moment
 - Violence / physical mutilation

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Initial Consultation

Second Stage: Trauma

- B. Coping with the experience
 - Issues of human accountability
 - Inner plans of action
 - Punishment or retaliation
 - Fears of counter-retaliation
 - Challenge to child's impulse control
 - Influence of previous trauma
 - Traumatic dreams
 - Future orientation
 - Current Stresses

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Initial Consultation

Third Stage: Closure

- A. Recapitulation
- B. Underscore realistic fears
- C. Universalize the child's responses
- D. Describe expectable course
- E. Acknowledge child's courage in undertaking the interview
- F. Invite child critique of consultation
- G. Proper leave-taking

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