

Psychological First Aid (PFA)

Purpose

Equip individuals, including professional actors, volunteers or community members, with knowledge and skills to deliver immediate support to individuals in acute distress and refer them to appropriate services.

Briefly about

PFA is an evidence-informed approach to help people affected by an emergency, or other crisis events that could potentially lead to trauma. It involves humane, supportive and practical assistance for people who are distressed, in ways that respect their dignity, culture and abilities.

PFA aims to reduce initial distress, meet immediate needs, and promote helpful coping. PFA can be delivered by anyone as basic psychological and social support. PFA can be followed by referral to more focused or specialized mental health intervention, or other forms of services/support if needed.

A PFA training is suitable as a first step before introducing and implementing other, more focused MHPSS interventions.

Target Groups

PFA Beneficiaries

PFA is suited for anyone in acute distress due to a recent crisis event. PFA can benefit individuals of all ages and backgrounds. It is not sufficient for people who require more specialized mental health treatment but can be used to identify and refer individuals in need of additional care and support.

PFA providers

The direct target group for PFA training is anyone in direct contact with crises affected individuals. It can range from managers and office staff to front line providers. Typical PFA providers are community (health) workers, teachers, healthcare providers and trained volunteers.

Outcomes

PFA Beneficiaries will likely experience the following changes:

- Increased sense of safety, calm and hope
- Improved ability to meet basic needs and access support
- Enhanced coping in the days and weeks after a crisis event

PFA providers will experience the following changes after the training:

- Increased knowledge and skills in providing basic psychological support

- Improved ability to assess needs, build rapport, use active listening, provide comfort and problem solving, and link people with appropriate resources and services
- Enhanced capacity to support community resilience and recovery after crises

Monitoring and evaluation

Because PFA is designed for immediate support rather than ongoing intervention, it is not suggested to conduct pre- and post-assessment with beneficiaries.

For monitoring purposes, it is recommended that basic data relevant to programme needs are recorded by the implementing organisation with specific focus on referral.

Key considerations

PFA should be adapted to the local context and culture. PFA Helpers should speak the local language.

PFA is not professional counselling and should always be implemented alongside a thorough mapping of services and established referral network.

When implementing PFA it is recommended to ensure a sustainable structure for supervision and support to providers.

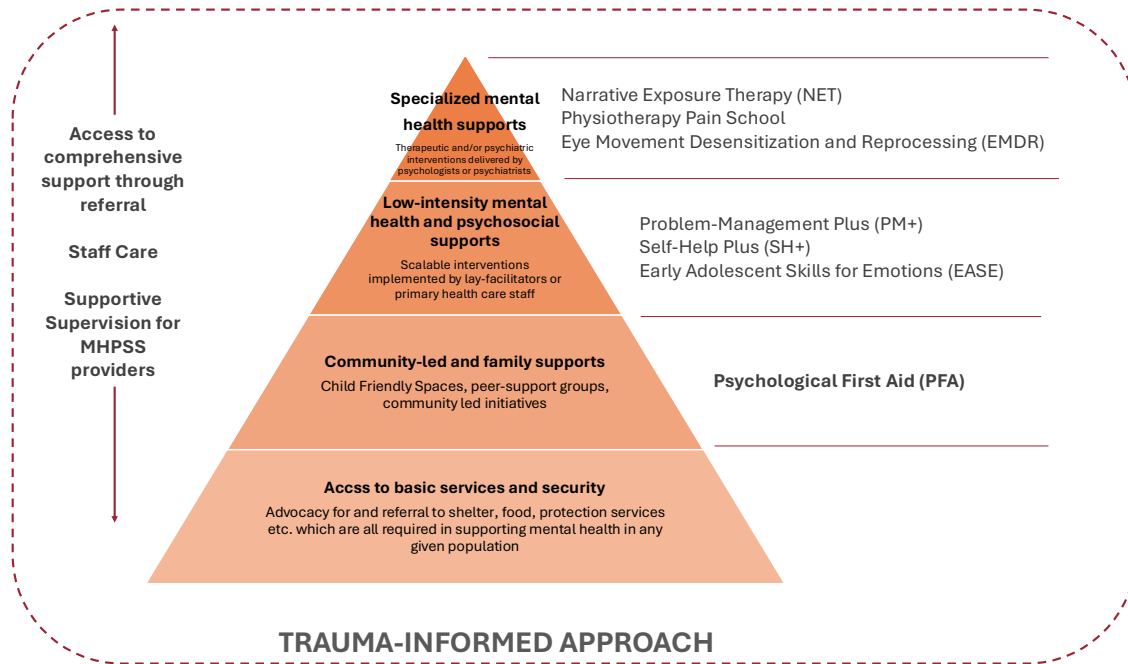
Engaging local mental health professionals in a Training of Trainers (ToT) is recommended to achieve a scalable and sustainable model.

Check questions

- ☐ In my organisation, we need skills to assist crisis-affected individuals
- ☐ Managers in my organisation is willing and able to establish relevant and sustainable support structures for PFA providers
- ☐ Staff in my organisation are willing to follow the guidelines and ethical standards for PFA

Type of intervention

PFA is a non-specialised intervention delivered by community members



Implementation overview: Psychological First Aid (PFA)

