



**Canadian  
Red Cross**

# **Psychological First Aid**

**POCKET GUIDE**

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**This booklet is not intended to replace proper Psychological First Aid training.**

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# Get Help

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**If you are in crisis, please call 9-1-1 immediately or locate a Crisis Centre in your region.**

## **Additional Resources:**

- If you need help but are not sure where to turn, consult with your healthcare provider or another trusted professional.
- For more information, you may also **phone 211** or **visit 211.ca** to access community, social, non-clinical health and related government services.
- **For Kids and Teens:** KidsHelpPhone.ca | 1-800-668-6868
- **For Adults:** Canadian Mental Health Association | cmha.ca

# What is Psychological First Aid?

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First aid for the mind and our social networks is just as important as first aid for the body.

Learning psychological first aid skills for mental health crisis could save a life.

**Psychological First Aid (PFA)** provides emotional and practical support to individuals, families, or communities who are having difficulty coping. It is about establishing a connection with people in a compassionate non-judgmental manner to bring calm and comfort.

It also helps to reduce stigma associated with mental health crises and can reduce negative health outcomes through general public and community building strategies on self-care and promoting conversations about wellness.

# Who, What, Where of Psychological First Aid

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## **WHO**

Any distressed person.

## **WHAT**

Before, during, or immediately after a crisis event.

## **WHERE**

Anywhere it is safe, but privacy is important in some situations.

# The Cycle

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## LOOK

Awareness that there is a problem; what does stress look like in ourselves or others.

## LISTEN

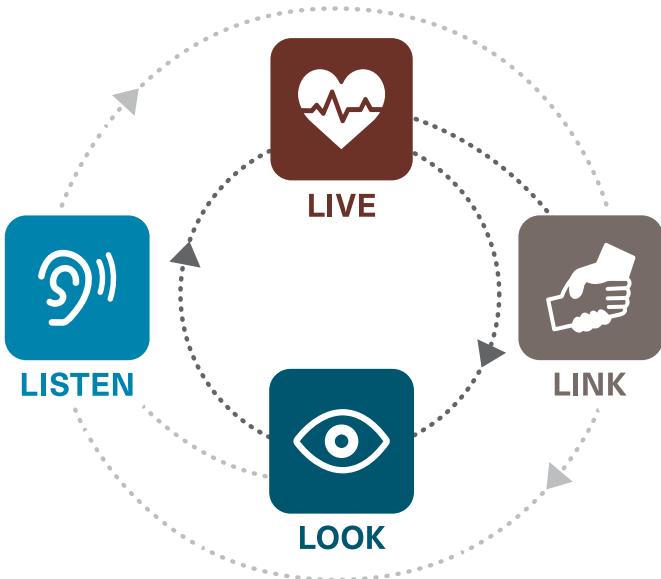
Listening to the warning signs in yourself or others.

## LINK

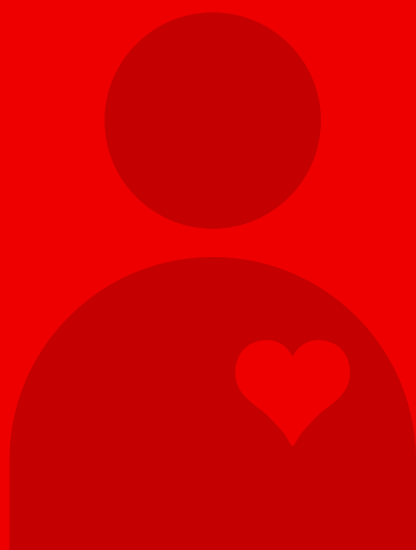
Linking to your self-care plan or resources in your community.

## LIVE

Living fully, bouncing forward.



# SELF-CARE





# Self-care Plan

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Understanding and taking care of yourself is a critical part of providing Psychological First Aid.

It is difficult to support someone else if you are not taking care of yourself. Your self-care plan identifies the support systems and protective factors you will use to manage stress to maintain your physical, mental, and emotional health. It is something that should be revisited regularly and will likely change.

# Stress Assessment

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## Day-to-Day Stress Self-Assessment Questionnaire

Do you frequently do any of the following?

Choose all that apply.

- Neglect your diet
- Try to do everything yourself
- Anger easily
- Set unrealistic goals
- Not find the humour in situations others find funny
- Become easily irritated
- Make a “big deal” of things
- Complain that you are disorganized
- Neglect your emotions
- Neglect exercise
- Have few supportive relationships
- Neglect sleep or rest
- Become angry when you are kept waiting

- Ignore signs of stress
- Procrastinate
- Think there is only one right way to do something
- Neglect to build relaxation into every day
- Spend a lot of time complaining about the past
- Race through the day
- Feel unable to cope with all you have to do

**Total:** \_\_\_\_\_

### **Results:**

**1-6** = Your basic stress level is low and easily managed.

**7-12** = You have fairly good stress management on a day-to-day basis.

**13-17** = Your basic stress is high and above a comfortable level.

**18+** = You have enough factors to put you in distress and should seek help.

# Personal Factors

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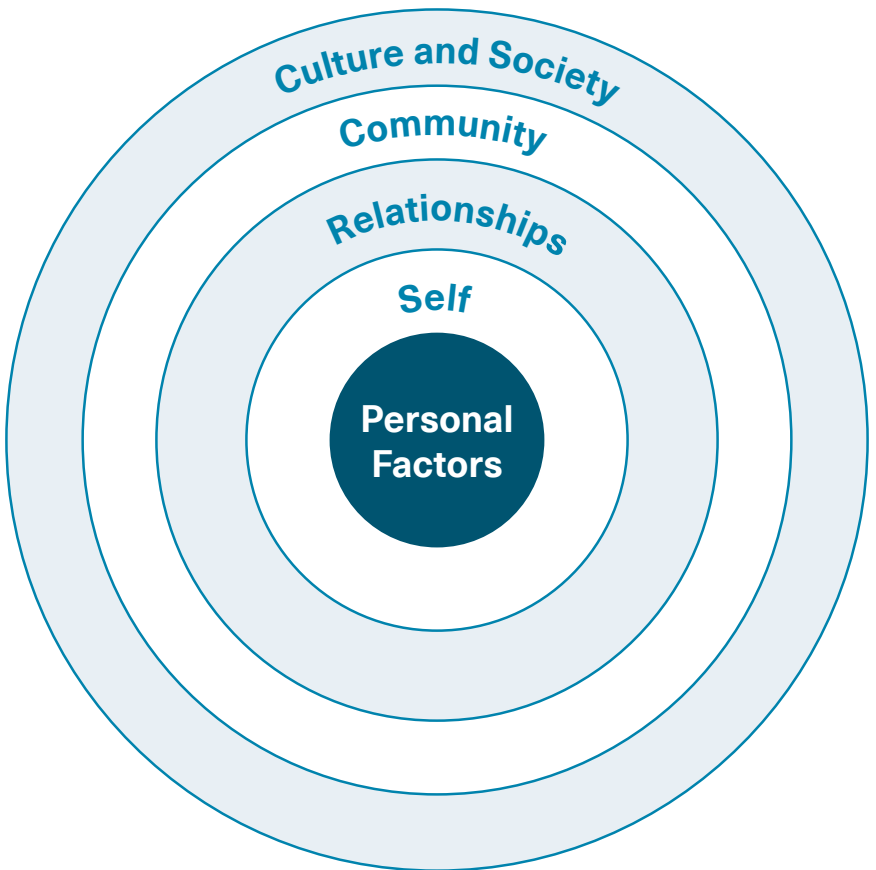
If you know you will be entering a stressful environment, it's helpful to identify your personal factors beforehand. They work together to keep you balanced. Some of these factors will be the links within your self-support system.



# Support Systems

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What links do you have access to within your Relationships, Community, and Culture and Society support systems?



# Look, Listen, Link and Live

## Use the cycle to keep you safe.

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**Look** for common signs that indicate stress:

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- Physical (stomach ache, tiredness)
- Mental (difficulty concentrating)
- Emotional (anxiety)
- Spiritual (loss of faith)
- Behavioural (recklessness, increased use of alcohol or drugs)
- Interpersonal (withdrawn or in conflict with others)



**Listen** to how you are feeling:

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- Acknowledge feelings and make no assumptions.
- Am I tired even though I've had enough sleep?
- Am I easily irritated by other people?
- Do I feel increasingly critical, cynical or disengaged?



**Link** to the support systems in place to help cope with stress.

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- **Self:** Actions you do individually to cope with stress (go for a run or listen to music).
- **Relationships:** Healthy relationships with family, friends, Elders and/or colleagues (a mentor).
- **Community:** Neighbourhood, club, workplace, or volunteer organizations.
- **Culture and Society:** Cultural traditions or religion and societal systems in place to protect you.



**Live** with coping strategies in place so you can continue living! Strategies include:

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- Taking breaks.
- Developing realistic work expectations.
- Listening to and supporting your team.
- Maintaining healthy habits (eating, sleeping, exercising).
- Practicing stress management techniques (breathing or mindfulness).
- Maintaining healthy relationships.
- Asking for help if you need it.

# CARE FOR OTHERS





# Psychological First Aid for Others

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Many of the same tools you would use when taking care of yourself are used when providing psychological first aid to others who may be experiencing loss or grief after a trauma.

**Loss:** Loss comes in many forms. It may be the death of a family member, friend, or pet, or the loss of a home, job, sentimental items, way of life, or a community.

**Grief:** When responding to people who are grieving, be sure to do the following:

- Reassure them that what they are feeling is to be expected.
- Avoid defining what they should be feeling or doing. There is no right way to grieve.
- Avoid making judgments. A person who is grieving may display strong emotions or no emotions at all.
- Do not take others' emotions personally.
- Allow people time to process their emotions. Pressuring them to move on will not help. There is no timetable for grieving.



## Look

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There are seven things you need to look for when caring for others:

- Signs of stress.
- Signs of distress (uncontrollable sobbing, inability to care for basic needs, silence, delusions).
- Nonverbal signs of communication.
- Basic needs covered.
- Signs of violence.
- Those requiring special attention.
- Resiliency.



## Listen

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Approach people and ask them about their needs and concerns to determine what kind of support they may need.

Ensure you carry out the following principles when listening to others:

**Be calm:** When approaching someone, be sure you are calm.

**Be open:** When asking if you can help, be open to listening to the person's experience.

Make no assumptions: Check your understanding as well as supporting and empowering others by providing accurate information, acknowledging their journey, and encouraging healthy coping strategies and decision-making.

### **Listening Tips:**

- Be present and respectful.
- Be compassionate.
- Consider the person's age, gender, cultural background, etc.
- Pay attention to verbal and nonverbal communication.
- Leave space for silence.
- Empathize.
- Be aware of tone and inflection of voice.



## **Link**

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There are four important considerations to make when supporting and linking people in crisis:

- Resources to meet basic needs.
- Accurate information.
- Loved ones.
- Social, cultural, and faith support networks.

Your goal is to empower someone to link into their self care plan or another resource if they are unable to.

You should learn about the resources that are available and the referral information in your community.

You have a legal obligation to report if someone is at risk of harm (from themselves or others) and get the person appropriate support. This includes knowing the following information:

- Your own organizational or workplace policies
- Provincial/territorial child protection policies
- Emergency medical services (EMS)/9-1-1 or a community crisis line



## Live

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Here is where you return to self-care and build resiliency in yourself. It is important to take care of yourself before, during, and after a stressful experience.

Self-care is an essential component to supporting others!

You may find it helpful to retake the self-assessment questionnaire as a way to check in with yourself.

- How do you feel?
- Do you need to link to any of your supports?

**DO NO HARM**



# Do No Harm

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The principle of Do No Harm originates in emergency medicine. It reminds healthcare providers that they must consider the possible harm that any intervention might do to a patient.

In Psychological First Aid, it refers to the unintentional harm that may be caused to those who are supposed to benefit from your intervention.

To create safer environments while helping others, use the Do No Harm Principles to inform your actions.

**Protection:** We must provide safe environments by linking people to protective services both in and out of their self-care plan.

**Respect:** People come from different places and have different experiences than you. Respect that they may not share your views.

**Integrity:** Do what you say and respect people's privacy and confidentiality.

**Dignity:** Strive to maintain the dignity of others and provide them with time and space if needed.

**Empathy:** Be aware of a person's feelings and try to see things from their perspective.

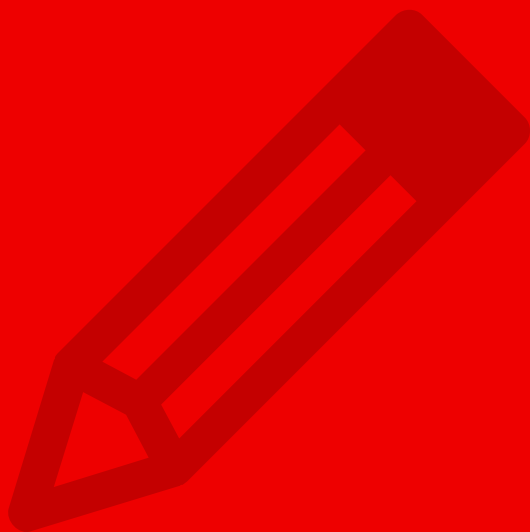
# Thank You!

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Psychological First Aid can be used before, during, or after a crisis event. It allows for a holistic approach to health, where individuals learn how to care for themselves and others' psychosocial wellness.

Thank you for taking the time to learn more about Psychological First Aid.

# GLOSSARY





# Glossary:

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**Active listening** occurs when you make a conscious effort to not just hear words, but to understand the complete message being communicated. (The complete message is communicated through body language and tone of voice in addition to words.)

**Burnout** is an emotional state due to long-term stress, characterized by chronic emotional exhaustion, depleted energy, impaired enthusiasm and motivation to work, diminished work efficiency, a diminished sense of personal accomplishment, pessimism, and cynicism.

**Compassion fatigue** is the gradual lessening of feelings of compassion toward those needing help.

**Coping** is the process of adapting to a new life situation, managing difficult circumstances, making an effort to solve problems, or seeking to reduce or tolerate stress or conflict.

A **crisis event** is an event outside of ordinary experiences that causes feelings of powerlessness, helplessness, or fear.

**Cumulative loss** consists of multiple losses occurring at the same time, or directly one after another, leaving the individual overwhelmed and with no time to process afterwards.

**Cumulative stress** occurs when the sources of stress continue over time or happen all at the same time and interfere with regular patterns of living. This type of stress can send a person into distress.

**Day-to-day stress** is made up of challenges in life that people face daily. This can be positive (motivating) or negative.

**Duty of care** is the legal obligation where, if someone is unsafe or needs help, you have a responsibility to link them to support.

**Extreme/traumatic stress** occurs when we are faced with severe or sudden strain; may result in an emotional crisis.

**Grief** is a natural process that is a response to sorrow and loss.

**Psychological First Aid (PFA)** is humane, supportive, practical – and sometimes eventative – help to those suffering crisis events and experiencing overwhelming stress.

**Resiliency** is the ability, based on skills, knowledge, experience, actions, and behaviour, to cope and realign from an adverse experience.

A **self-care plan** identifies the internal and external support systems you will use to manage stress in order to maintain your physical, mental, and emotional health.

**Stress** is a normal response to an abnormal physical or emotional situation. Stress occurs when demands are out of balance with our resources for coping.

**Sudden loss** occurs without warning and leaves no opportunity to prepare.

**Support systems** are the biological, psychological, and social factors within a person and their relationships, community, culture, and society that allow the person to cope with the effects of stress.



**Canadian  
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### **[myrc.redcross.ca](https://myrc.redcross.ca)**

Log in to sign up for an online course in Psychological First Aid, as well as a wide selection other first aid courses.

### **[shop.redcross.ca](https://shop.redcross.ca)**

Visit our online shop for first aid items and emergency preparedness kits.

### **[redcross.ca/apps](https://redcross.ca/apps)**

Download the free First Aid App and get instant access to videos, interactive quizzes, and simple, step-by-step advice.

### **[redcross.ca/volunteer](https://redcross.ca/volunteer)**

Learn more about Red Cross volunteer opportunities in your community.

**Red Cross First Aid.**

The Experience to Make a Difference.