Alberta Health Services
Psychological First Aid
Learning Module

Psychological First Aid
Supporting staff before, during, and in the aftermath of crisis events

Updated: Apr 25, 2020
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Introduction

Your participant guide

The Resilience, Wellness & Mental Health Support Strategy is pleased to provide you with your Participant Guide for the learning component of the Staff-focused Psychological First Aid learning module. This Participant Guide has been created as part of AHS’ continuing focus to support the conditions that enable us to do our best work. This learning module package supports the LEADS capabilities of “Leads Self, Engage Others & Achieve Results”. In addition, participating in this module supports the AHS values and core behaviours, which enables us to focus on inspiring, empowering and guiding how we work together to build healthy communities and support Albertans leading healthy lives.

AHS Values

Our values are at the heart of everything that we stand for – they inspire, empower and guide how we work together with patients, clients, families and each other. The values provide us with a common understanding of what’s important and guide our actions and interactions in support of providing health care that is truly patient- and family-centred. Whatever we do and wherever we work, we contribute to building healthy communities because we are stronger together.

Core Competencies

Our values, along with our vision, mission and Code of Conduct form the main strands of our DNA. But like DNA, it’s what makes us both the same and different. These pieces give us a common direction and goals. But how we contribute and get to those goals is what makes us different and are influenced by who we are, where we are and what we do.

Performing well in our role requires us to draw from different competencies. We know technical knowledge and expertise is a critical to quality care and services, but how this knowledge, experience and expertise is applied (the behaviours and attributes displayed as you work) differentiates high performance and the experiences we have.

It is all connected

Competencies are one area where this stands out.
LEADS Framework

LEADS in a Caring Environment (LEADS) framework is a leadership capabilities framework representing an innovative and integrated investment in the future of health leadership in Canada. It provides a comprehensive approach to leadership development for the Canadian health sector, including leadership within the whole-system, within the health organizations, and within individual leaders.

The LEADS Framework represents the key skills, abilities, and knowledge required to lead at all levels of an organization. It aligns and consolidates the competency frameworks and leadership strategies that are found in Canada’s health sector and other progressive organizations.

LEADS - Leads Self

The Leads Self domain consists of four capabilities. Self-motivated leaders:
1. are self-aware,
2. manage themselves,
3. develop themselves, and
4. demonstrate character.

LEADS - Engages Others

The Engage Others domain consists of four capabilities. Engaging leaders:
1. fosters the development of others
2. contributes to the creation of healthy organizations
3. communicates effectively
4. builds teams.

LEADS – Achieves Results

The Achieves results domain consists of four capabilities. Goal-oriented leaders:
1. set direction
2. strategically align decisions with vision, values and evidence
3. take action to implement decisions
4. assess and evaluate/
Topics and structure of this learning module

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discussion focus</th>
<th>This module focuses on:</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Our common experience</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- History of PFA</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- The Psychosocial aspect of PFA</td>
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<td>- Understanding PFA</td>
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<td>- Providing PFA</td>
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<td>- Scenario</td>
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<td>- Health footprint of this pandemic</td>
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<td>- Self-care</td>
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| Participant Guide structure | This participant guide is separated between providing information and background on Psychological First Aid and the practical reflections, discussions and experiential learning included in the Zoom portion of this training. Not all of the information provided in this guide will be addressed/discussed during the 3-hour session conducted via Zoom. Nor are all of the slides presented during the Zoom session included in this participant guide. |
Our common experience

Grief and loss

Grief and loss are a common experience after any disaster and can include material losses, social structures, pets, cherished possessions, family and friends.

The magnitude of the loss, ongoing threats to health, safety, and survival all make grieving more complex than under normal circumstances.

Most people will grieve when they need to and will have times they prefer to focus on other tasks and challenges.

As a PFA Responder, you will hear stories of grief and loss; be aware if those stories resonate powerfully for you and your own response to what you're hearing.

As this pandemic progresses, changes and the need to adjust are frequently and continually shifting, inviting uncertainty, confusion, and anxiety. There’s often a progression of micro-losses as public health measures increase. We lose our sense of connection with our loved ones, work, teams, routine, normalcy, security, and privilege of usual freedoms. This can be disconcerting, disorienting, and invite anger and sadness both within ourselves and the people we support as a PFA Responder.

Goals of PFA training

- Share knowledge & skills
- Build confidence
- Build capacity

When delivering PFA, we can offer our best support to help others and help them care for themselves by also acknowledging and caring for our own physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual aspects. We can work together to build tools that make sense within our AHS community.
History of PFA

Roots of PFA

PFA was developed by the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (NC-PTSD), a section of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs, in 2006. It has been spread by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, Community Emergency Response Team (CERT), the American Psychological Association (APA) and many others. It was developed in a two-day intensive collaboration, involving more than 25 disaster mental health researchers, an online survey of the first cohort that used PFA and repeated reviews of the draft.

Grounded in Psychosocial support

Psychosocial support looks at individuals within the context of the combined influence that psychological and the surrounding social environment have on physical and mental wellness and ability to function.

Within the PFA context, psychosocial support means helping people meet their everyday emotional and social needs during and after an emergency/disaster.

People have many different emotional and social needs, and there are different ways to meet them. Professionals and non-professionals can provide psychosocial support- it's separate from treating mental illness because everyone has psychosocial needs, but not everyone has mental illness.

This approach/response can be provided by anyone – both professionals and non-professionals and is not considered a clinical intervention. This workshop is not intended to teach people clinical skills in counselling or to be trauma experts.

Sometimes, psychosocial support just means listening to what someone identifies as a need and offering resources to help meet that need. Here's a video that demonstrates how easy PFA support can be: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H_ZiZvjkKDE
AHS’ Approach to PFA

AHS Psychosocial Stepped Care Model

AHS’ Stepped Care Model has been adapted from the WHO (2012), National Research Council (2003), IASC (2007), IFRC (2009a) & IFRC (2009b).

The left side of the diagram demonstrates the level of needs and timing of interventions, the right side of the diagram shows examples of the type of support /responses that are needed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact/Onset</th>
<th>Response</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Everyone affected by a pandemic will need timely, accurate, up-to-date information.</td>
<td>A large portion of AHS staff will require more focused support to meet their everyday emotional and social needs.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recovery (short-term)</th>
<th>Recovery (long-term)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Most people will recover on their own with minimal supports. However, some people will have stress and difficulties that may require additional emotional support. This doesn’t mean they have a mental health problem or illness, for most people more focused, action-oriented support services to help them to recover.</td>
<td>A smaller percentage of people will require professional mental health treatment or referral-based support (current addiction and mental health supports, along with specialized pandemic clinical services).</td>
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</table>

We are both in the impact and response phase in this pandemic.
Along with the Stepped Care Model, AHS’ approach to PFA is grounded in 5 essential elements.

Evidence-based research on human resilience post-trauma shows that people impacted by disasters or emergencies tend to recover better if they feel safe, they’re connected to others, and have access to social, physical, and emotional support. This can help people to regain a sense of control by being able to help themselves.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5 essential elements</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Promote Safety</strong></td>
<td>This can include providing impacted individuals with accurate information.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Promote Calm</strong></td>
<td>Disasters and emergencies create a number of stressors and losses at the same time. This can cause feelings of anxiety and uncertainty which can interfere with sleep, decision-making, and effective coping. Validating that these feelings are normal and encouraging calming techniques (e.g., deep breathing, meditation) can help reduce anxiety.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Promote Self &amp; Community Efficacy</strong></td>
<td>Efficacy—Disaster research shows that loss of personal, social, and economic resources can lead to a diminished perception of self-efficacy and confidence in the community’s ability to recovery. Encourage individuals to carry on regular activities and look for opportunities participate in community or group activities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Instill Hope</strong></td>
<td>A crucial component in disaster recovery. Helping impacted individuals envision a realistic future (including challenges and support) can instill hope and optimism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Promote Connectedness</strong></td>
<td>Social support improves emotional well-being and recovery. It’s important to involve, engage, and connect with others, increasing the quantity, quality and frequency of supportive interactions. During a pandemic, this connection and community participation can occur in unique and innovative ways (e.g., online performances, group movie viewing/gaming apps, etc.)</td>
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What is Psychological First Aid?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose of PFA</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Reduce stress</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Assist with current needs</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Provide coping strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Help find balance and connect people with spiritual, social, physical, and emotional support</td>
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We are all impacted by this pandemic, and these impacts are, and will continue to be, arriving in waves. Understanding what PFA is and providing PFA support helps us sustain resiliency, feel more in control and confident and in turn experience a greater sense of efficacy and hope.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resiliency in these challenging times</th>
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<td>What has helped you be resilient during this pandemic?</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PFA is and is not....</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PFA is:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Non-intrusive, supportive and practical assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Identifying needs and concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Listening but not pressuring to talk</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Helping connect to information, services &amp; social supports</td>
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<td>• Comforting</td>
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<tr>
<th>PFA is not:</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Something only professionals can do</td>
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<td>• Professional counselling</td>
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<tr>
<td>• “Psychological debriefing”</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Pressuring people to tell you their feelings and reactions</td>
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<th>You are already skilled</th>
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<td>What about your current AHS role positions you well to support PFA?</td>
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Everyone can provide PFA support and you already have knowledge, skill and ability to do so.
Providing PFA

Think about a time when you successfully stepped in to help someone in crisis (or someone stepped in to help you)....What made what you (or they) did or said help?

What works

Why PFA is effective

PFA is effective because:
- It helps people:
  - Feel safe, connected to others, calm and hopeful
  - Have access to social, physical and emotional support
  - Feel able to help themselves

PFA Action Principles

Prepare, Look, Listen & Link

- Adaptable to local context
- Reflect best practices on how to support staff
Prepare

- Be aware of what supports are available

Preparation is an important first step especially with uncertainty and constantly evolving information. This step may look different depending on where we are providing support. In the staff/peer environment, you will need to understand work-related pressures, roles, and resources.

Look

- Adapt to consider the person’s organizational and personal culture
- Serious distress reactions require additional support

Within our work environments, look out for our peers who may be struggling, paying attention to their emotional and stress reactions and coping strategies.

Listen

- Ask about needs & concerns
- Help the individual to feel calm
- Respect safety, dignity and rights

As a responder, you will not be able to meet all their needs, so it’s critical to find out what’s most important to the person at that moment and help them decide what they need to do first (according to their identified needs).
### Barriers to listening

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<th>In thinking about preparing, looking &amp; listening, what barriers might you have to overcome?</th>
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### Link

**Link**

- Match understandable and correct supports available to what you’ve heard and discussed
- Help people to help themselves and to regain control of their situation

**Why is this important?**

Providing information about what is being done to address the consequences of the pandemic will help reorient and comfort people.
A key part of PFA is matching understandable and correct supports available to what you’ve heard and discussed. One way to get a sense of what really matters to the individual is to map what you’ve heard them identify as what really matters.

You are also experiencing this pandemic so now we’d like you to imagine what you would identify as what really matters to you if asked by a PFA Responder:

What would you identify as the most important need/concern?

What resources would you suggest to help this need/concern if you were the PFA Responder?
Where PFA is applicable

AHS' Mental Health Continuum model was developed using the Road to Mental Readiness model developed by the Mental Health Commission of Canada, the Canadian Armed Forces, and the Calgary Police Service to address stigma surrounding mental illness in first responder practitioners and to teach them how to build resiliency.

Making it real

Putting all this into action

This next section will walk you through some strategies of how to put the PFA Action steps into action.
Meet Sandra

My name is Sandra. I'm an RN on a designated COVID unit.

Prepare

Preparation is an important first step especially with uncertainty and constantly evolving information. There also can be challenges in navigating and accessing supports/resources.

Fears & reactions can emerge due to lack of knowledge, rumours, and misinformation. PFA responders have a valuable role in providing accurate and timely information, dispelling myths (including info about the disease/virus), sharing clear messages about healthy, adaptive behaviours, and helping individuals to build trust in their own capacity to cope.

Within the AHS environment, it’s critical to understand work related pressures, roles and resources.

Breakout - Prepare

Knowing what unit Sandra works on, how will you prepare to support her?

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Prepare

- First, prepare yourself to respond
- Gather as much information as possible
- Have AHS website and pandemic resources handout with you
- Know ahead of time what supports are currently available and how to access these supports
- Identify mental wellness resources and contacts

Looking at Sandra

I’m just getting ready for my shift.

Look

- Adapt to consider the person’s organizational and personal culture
- Serious distress reactions require additional support

Within our work environments, look out for our peers who may be struggling, paying attention to their emotional and stress reactions and coping strategies.

We know that frontline workers may experience additional stressors during COVID due to a number of factors: higher work demands, fears that they will pass COVID 19 onto their friends and family as a result of their work, reduced capacity to use social support and perhaps lack of energy to implement basic self-care.

Breakout - Look

How can you “look” at Sandra in a virtual environment? What are you looking for?

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Breakout - Serious distress

What might indicate to you that a person is in serious distress?

- Pay attention to emotional and stress reactions and coping strategies
- Model healthy responses by remaining calm and helpful
- Be visible in the virtual environment (camera)
- Ensure the contact is not intrusive or disruptive
- Help the person become physically comfortable

Ask the individual to give their whereabouts/alternative contact information in case the call/skype is dropped or if there is a medical emergency

Listening to Sandra

“It’s stressful enough working on a COVID unit, but lately, when I go to the locker room, co-workers don’t want to even be near me. They’re being incredibly rude about me touching things in the locker room and I can hear muttering under their breath. They’re acting like they don’t even know me anymore – like I don’t know proper hygiene.

People that I have known for years are telling me I shouldn’t be allowed in a locker room for “normal” staff and that I’m putting everyone at risk.

I can’t believe people are treating me this way. It’s getting so I don’t want to go to work and I know that puts extra strain on everyone else in my unit but I don’t feel I can cope with this crap much longer.
Your goal is to:
1. reduce distress
2. assist with current needs
3. promote adaptive functioning.

What might Sandra's needs/concerns be:
### Listen

- Introduce yourself by name and position to help the individual become comfortable with you
- Listen carefully to what the individual is telling you about their situation and what their needs are
- **Let the person speak without interruption and tell you how you can help**
  - Don't assume the person will be able to talk right away or even want assistance
  - Just being present in a supportive and calm way can help the individual feel safer and want to talk
  - Focus on what the individual has done that has been effective
  - Answer questions – if you don't have the answer try to find accurate information
  - **Silence is ok** – it gives the individual time to process information and emotions
  - Focus on problem-solving and applying coping strategies to address the most important issues the individual identifies
  - Ask open-ended questions to promote individual problem-solving and positive coping

- Don't focus on mistakes or perceived weaknesses
- Don't ask for more details of their experience or ask “why” questions

Your words/language are a gift; there is immense value in effectively conveying empathy and compassion when offering support by phone, video or text. Consider organizational/cultural contexts and histories that may influence the individual’s responses (or lack of response) to your attempts to help, taking time to validate their experiences and normalize stress reactions.

### Empathy vs Sympathy

What is the best way to ease someone's pain and suffering? In this beautifully animated RSA Short, Dr Brené Brown reminds us that we can only create a genuine empathic connection if we are brave enough to really get in touch with our own fragilities.

Link: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Evwgu369Jw)
When emotions are high

- Feelings of being overwhelmed
- Unable to process information
- Unable to focus

Reassurance is essential to stabilizing emotions

How do you react when a conversation suddenly becomes tense or awkward?

My Learning Link has courses that can help strengthen knowledge, skill and ability in listening strategies.

What strategies have you used in the past?

Listening strategies

Inquiry vs advocacy

There’s a huge difference

Providing PFA support hinges on how well you have great conversations – and most of us don’t converse very well. A great conversation requires a balance between talking and listening.

Celeste Headlee gives a great Tedx talk on the subject: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H6n3iNh4XLI
Why is this important?
Providing information about what is being done to address the consequences of the pandemic will help reorient and comfort people.

Breakout - Link

What resources/supports will you identify for Sandra?

- Social distancing, quarantines and social isolation can make social support links challenging
  - Identify which issues are most pressing and link resources to those issues
  - Encourage linkages to individuals with common experiences, humour, shared skills and interests
  - Have a list ready of contacts for emotional and practical supports
  - Express your gratitude – thank them for sharing their experience and allowing you to help them
### Helping responsibly

- Encourage positive coping strategies
- Give accurate information
- Answer questions
- Focus discussion on problem-solving

- Ensure accurate and timely information is provided
- Make sure the resources you are suggesting does not cause further harm

Identify the need for professional assistance if the person’s behaviours or actions demonstrate risk to harm to themselves or others

### Self-care

#### Self-checks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tr>
<td>What in-the-moment self-care actions are most helpful for you?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What makes self-care difficult to do?</td>
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</table>
Before volunteering as a PFA responder do a self-reflection to make sure your personal self-care plan is still being effective.

### Before responding

Assess what might impact your ability to be effective as a PFA provider:
- Personal life challenges
- Personal or family commitments taking your attention
- Reductions in physical, emotional, mental and/or spiritual well-being

Assess your comfort level with the various situations you may experience while providing PFA:
- What is your personal situation like at the moment?
- Are you ready to help?
- Can you take time off to provide support?
- Are there life stresses or family commitments that need attention?

Assess your physical and mental health:
- What is your physical and mental health like right now?
- How can you stay physically and emotionally healthy?

It’s okay to pass on this work if the timing isn’t right for you.