

NORTHERN NEVADA ADULT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES (NNAMHS)
POLICY AND PROCEDURE

SUBJECT: PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID AND RESPONSE TEAM

NUMBER: NN-HR-08

Page 1 of 4

ORIGINAL DATE: 08/13/98

REVIEW/REVISE DATE: 05/01/03, 10/05/06, 8/20/09, 6/17/10, 4/18/13

APPROVAL _____ Cody L. Phinney _____, Agency Director

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I. PURPOSE

To minimize long-term negative impact by responding to and managing severe stress reactions experienced by individuals exposed to traumatic events.

II. POLICY

NNAMHS will respond with care and stress/disaster management intervention to individuals and groups who have experienced a traumatic event. Psychological First Aid (PFA) can also be provided to first responders and other disaster relief workers.

III. REFERENCES

"Psychological First Aid Field Operation Guide" by Melissa Brymer, Christopher Layne, Anne Jacobs, Robert Pynoos, Joseph Ruzek, Alan Steinberg, Eric Vernberg, and Patricia Watson.

IV. DEFINITIONS

1. Crisis Event: An event, which produces a temporary state of psychological disequilibrium and a subsequent state of emotional and cognitive turmoil.

2. Critical Incident: An event, which has a stressful impact sufficient to overwhelm the usually effective coping skills of either an individual or a group.
3. Critical Incident Stress: The reaction a person or group has to a disaster characterized by a wide range of cognitive, physiological, social, emotional, and behavioral signs and symptoms.
4. Psychological First Aid and Response Team: A team composed of professional and peer support personnel trained in PFA.
5. Psychological First Aid- An evidence-based informed modular approach to help children, adolescents, adults, and families in the immediate aftermath of a disaster and terrorism. PFA is designed to reduce the initial distress caused by traumatic events and to foster short and long-term adaptive functioning and coping.
6. Professional Support Personnel: Trained psychiatrists, psychologists, licensed clinical social workers, nurses, and mental health professionals.
7. Trauma: An event, which attacks the psyche and breaks through the defense system with the potential to significantly disrupt one's life, perhaps resulting in a personality change or physical illness.

## V. PROCEDURES

### A. Core Actions of Psychological First Aid

1. The core actions of PFA constitute the basic objectives of providing early assistance within days or weeks following an event.
2. Providers shall be flexible, and base the amount of time they spend on each core action on the survivors' specific needs and concerns.
3. The PFA Response Team is composed of a number of Mental Health and Developmental Services employees trained in PFA developed by the National Traumatic Stress Network and National Center for PTSD.

### B. Objectives of Psychological First Aid

1. Establish a human connection in a non-intrusive, compassionate manner.
2. Enhance immediate and ongoing safety, and provide physical and emotional comfort.
3. Calm and orient emotionally overwhelmed or distraught survivors.

4. Help survivors to tell you specifically what their immediate needs and concerns are, and gather additional information as appropriate.
5. Offer practical assistance and information to help survivors address their immediate needs and concerns
6. Connect survivors as soon as possible to social support networks, including family members, friends, and community helping resources
7. Support adaptive coping, acknowledge coping efforts and strengths, and empower survivors. Encourage adults, children, and families to take an active role in their recovery.
8. Provide information that may help survivors cope effectively with the psychological impact of disasters.
9. Provide clear information regarding availability, and (when appropriate) link the survivor to another member of a disaster response team or to local recovery systems, mental health services, public-sector services, and organizations.

C. Organizational Structure for Psychological First Aid Response Team

1. The NNAMHS Director of Psychology is the PFA Response Team Coordinator
2. The NNAMHS PFA Response Team will meet bi-annually for training and business sessions conducted by the PFA coordinator.
3. The team will consist of peer support personnel and professional support personnel.
4. The PFA coordinator is a licensed mental health professional who is an active clinical member of the Washoe County Psychological First Aid Team.
5. The PFA coordinator is fully trained as a trainer in Psychological First Aid methods as taught by the National Child/Adult Stress Network and the National Center for PTSD.
6. The PFA coordinator or designee is available during regular working hours Monday through Friday between 8 am and 5 pm, or outside regular working hours at the discretion of the Agency Director, or designee.
7. Meetings will cover business issues related to the PFA Response Team's function as well as practical training and new training information needed for the team's response readiness.

8. The PFA team will maintain training for response readiness and provide a number of interventions as needed.

D. Accessing the Psychological First Aid Response Team

1. The NNAMHS Agency Director or the designee activates the team response through a directive given by their office to the PFA coordinator or designee.
2. Intervention response will then be based on individual or group needs within a 72-hour window or as close to this time frame as possible.
3. If an individual department would like to access the team or one of its members, they should contact the Agency Director's office or designee, who will give the directive to respond to the request to the PFA coordinator.

E. New Recruitment of Psychological First Aid Response Team members

1. Annually, during the first pay period in October, a recruitment drive will be held for new members to join the PFA Response Team. This will be done in form of an invitational letter by the Agency Director and the PFA coordinator to be delivered to employees.
2. PFA Response Team members may participate as long as they desire to volunteer for the role and are employed at NNAMHS. There is no term limit.