

Robin Zagurski, L.C.S.W.
Denise Bulling, M.A.
Robin Chang, M.A.
2005

1

Nebraska Psychological First Aid Training Program
University of Nebraska Public Policy Center

Brief Overview

This training program is an adaptation of “Community-Based Psychological Support” developed by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The purpose of the Nebraska psychological first aid program is to equip natural helpers to provide psychological support to survivors of critical events (e.g. disasters, conflicts, accidents, etc.). This training program is 8 hours long and designed to fit into the busy schedule of natural helpers and community responders. It is segmented into seven modules, each addressing critical skills that can make an immediate and lasting impact on a person’s psychological health following a crisis.

The Modules

- (1) Psychological support – 1 hour
Defines psychological support and provides natural helpers with skills to provide support to individuals following critical events. The module focuses on providing psychological support in disasters, but the approach is applicable and relevant to other contexts as well.
- (2) Stress and coping – 1 hour
This module focuses on how natural helpers can help people manage stress. Basic information about stress and coping is provided along with simple intervention techniques.
- (3) Supportive communication – 1.5 hour
Natural helpers may find themselves in challenging situations, where feeling confident about how to communicate well with other people is vitally important. This module provides practical communication tools that can be used in many situations.
- (4) Promoting community self-help – 1 hour
Module 4 explores how to engage individuals and communities in their own recovery process. Engaging people in their own recovery can reduce feelings of powerlessness, which in turn may reduce the risk of developing more serious psychological problems later.
- (5) Populations with special needs – 1 hour
Module 5 describes populations who are vulnerable to the psychological effects of a disaster or traumatic event. It explores the psychological needs of these groups, while recognizing the vital role they play in social and community structures.
- (6) Helping the helper – .5 hour
Timely and adequate support for helpers is a prerequisite for providing quality care and relief to others. Helpers may be affected both positively and negatively by the experiences they have caring for others. This module provides information on how helpers can care for their own mental health needs.
- (7) De-escalation – 2 hour

This module focuses on working with agitated or angry individuals and the strategies that can be employed to assist them. Natural helpers are introduced to active listening, interviewing and empathy skills that are useful in helping others manage fear and anxiety.

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. (2003). Community-based psychological support Training manual.

Zagurski, R., Bulling, D., Chang, R. (2004). Nebraska Psychological First Aid Curriculum. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Public Policy Center.

This participant guide is designed to reinforce the major points of this curriculum. Much of the material is reinforced by activities and discussion during the training session. Adults learn in different ways – some learn by doing, others by hearing the material, and some by seeing it written down. This training is designed to be delivered in all three ways. The participant guide is one of the tools relied upon to give the adult learner in this course a meaningful experience.

2

Module 1 – Psychological Support Notes

Disasters are critical events characterized by loss among multiple aspects of life: loved ones, economically, community and dignity.

Disaster mental health focuses on _____ (1) responses to an abnormal situation. The community responder may take on a number of activities to fulfill their role of providing “_____ (2) first aid,” including

- Provide Social support
- Educate about normal and abnormal stress reactions
- Teach Stress Management techniques
- Mobilize Community Resources

The three goals of providing Psychological Support are:

1. Relieve _____ (3), both emotional and physical
2. Improve people’s short term functioning
3. _____ (4) the individual’s course of recovery

The basic principles that provide a framework for implementing psychological support in disasters include the following:

- Do no _____ (5)
- Use a Community-based approach
- Recognize and uses indigenous healing networks and practices
- Use trained personnel
- Empower affected people
- Encourage Community participation
- Exercise Care with terminology
- Encourage Active involvement
- Value Early intervention
- Use Viable interventions

Learning Objectives:

- Describe the purpose of psychological support
- Describe the role of community responders in the provision of psychological support
- Describe the basic principles involved in the implementation of a psychological support program in a disaster situation

3

Module 2 – Stress and Coping Notes

Most people react to a perceived threat or challenge in the environment with _____ (6): a state of physical and/or psychological arousal.

Stress reactions are experienced at the physical, cognitive (how we perceive and "think" about events), emotional, behavioral and spiritual levels.

Stress Reaction Phases

1. Acute phase (minutes to hours or days)
2. Reaction phase (1-6 weeks)
3. Repair phase (1-6 months)
4. Reorientation phase (approximately 6 months)

Coping with Stress

Coping is a way to prevent, delay, avoid, or manage _____ (7).

Coping mechanisms can be placed in three broad categories

1. Changing the source of stress
2. Changing the view of the situation
3. Tolerating the stressor until it passes or becomes less troublesome

Loss and Grief

Loss is a common theme in most disaster settings. It is normal to experience _____ (8) in response to loss.

Common reactions to loss

- Denial, numbness or shock
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Anger
- Acceptance
- Reorientation

Learning Objectives

- Use the terminology of stress and coping
- Describe how people react to and cope with stress
- Describe common reactions to loss and grief
- Employ guidelines for the provision of psychological support

4

Immediately following a disaster or critical event, some people may appear dazed or in shock. This usually subsides quickly, but if it does not, the person may be having a difficult reaction. An opposite response is also possible, where the person becomes extremely emotional and seems unable to regain control of his or her emotions. Either of

these extremes, emotional _____ (9) or extreme agitation deserves immediate attention and coping assistance.

The following are general principles of psychological support that specifically apply to the immediate situation, and are sometimes referred to as psychological first aid:

- First _____ (10) from danger
- Focus on physical and material care
- Be direct, active and remain calm
- Focus on the “here and now” situation
- Provide accurate information about the situation
- Assist with mobilization of resources
- Do not give false assurances
- Recognize the importance of taking action
- Reunite with family members
- Provide and ensure emotional support
- Focus on strengths and resilience
- Encourage self-reliance
- Respect feelings and cultures of others

Crisis Intervention

While psychological support is not intended as a solution for such situations, it is still important to have an understanding of how appropriately respond. Above all, remember to maintain your own safety.

The following seven steps are a well-accepted sequence for resolving a crisis:

1. Assess the situation
2. Establish _____ (11)
3. Identify the main problem (s)
4. Deal with feelings and emotions
5. Generate and explore alternative coping strategies
6. Formulate an action plan
7. Follow up

5

Module 3 – Supportive Communication Notes

Communication Values

The following set of values is important to effective communication

- (12) Competence
- Empathy
- Respect
- Genuineness
- Positive regard
- Non-judgmental
- Empowering
- Practical
- Confidentiality
- Ethical conduct

Interpersonal Communication Skills

Being aware of the following three communication components may help to improve your ability to understand and support affected people:

1. _____ (13) communication
2. Listening and responding
3. Giving feedback

Learning Objectives

- Recognize the values that characterize the supportive communication style
- Communicate effectively in challenging situations
- Describe communication elements that support resilience and self-help
- Work with groups of people in a community setting
- Understand when and how to refer people to other professionals or organizations

6

Increasing Trust and Confidence

General behaviors (depending on culture) to increase trust and confidence:

- Face the speaker
- Display an open posture
- Keep an appropriate distance
- Frequent and soft eye contact
- Appear calm and relaxed

Listening and Responding

- Seek to understand first, then to be understood
- Concentrate on what is being said
- Be an _____ (14) listener (nod, affirm)
- Be aware of your own biases/values
- Listen and look for feelings
- Do not rehearse your answers
- Pause to think before answering
- Use clarifying questions and statements
- Ask mostly open-ended questions
- Ask for additional details

Ways of Responding

- Ask mostly _____ (15) questions
- Address thoughts or feelings
- Paraphrase
- Avoid giving outright advice

7

Assisted Coping

Remember that the goal is not for you to cope for people, but to provide the necessary assistance to help them cope themselves.

- The RIBEYE Model gives both the helper and the person being assisted an easy way to remember the important aspects of problem solving.

R = _____ (16)

- I = Identify the problem
- B = Brainstorm possible solutions
- E = Evaluate each possible solution
- Y = Yes to one of the choices
- E = Encourage and congratulate yourself for making a decision

Working with Groups

- Define a group with an issue which will motivate active participation
- Psychological well-being comes from community participation and cooperative effort
- Sense of membership and worth can be derived from belonging to an effective group

Making a Referral

Referral means the act of recommending that a person speak to a professional who is more competent to handle the difficulties and complexities of his/her needs.
Refer in consultation with your supervisor.

8

When to Refer

- When the person hints or talks openly about _____ (17)
- If there is a possibility of child abuse or any criminal activity
- The problem is beyond your training or capabilities
- The person seems to be socially isolated
- The person has imaginary ideas or feelings of persecution
- You have difficulty maintaining real contact with the person
- You become aware of dependency on alcohol or drugs
- When the person is engaging in risky or threatening behavior
- When you yourself become:
 - o Restless and confused
 - o Have negative recurring thoughts
 - o Dreams about the case
 - o Feel you are the ONLY one who can help

How to Refer

- Inform the person concerned about your intentions. Let him/her know that you care and then explain the reasons for the referral
- Present different options. Discuss matters such as fees, location, accessibility, etc.
- Assure them that you will continue your support until the referral is complete
- Arrange for a follow up call or visit

9

Module 4 – Promoting Community Self-help Notes

Community Participation

Community participation helps establish ownership of support or relief initiatives and may lead to more sustainable recovery. Community participation, here meaning self-help, assumes:

1. Recovery projects are based on ideas developed by the concerned people themselves

2. A planned process exists that encourages community participation

Promoting Self Help

Community responders are in a good position to promote the process of community self-help. In many instances, they are part of the affected community - they share the same language and often cultural background, and may be better able to provide support to affected people than someone coming in from outside the community.

The following are essential elements in the process of promoting community self-help:

- Identify and involve community leaders or influential persons.
- Establish a sense of ownership by the community.
- Identify community resources.
- Promote psychological well-being.
- Mobilize resources.
- Encourage _____ (18) decision making and consensus.

Learning Objectives

- Describe the factors that make a community supportive and healthy for its members
- Give details of how communities can be helped to use their own resources for solving problems
- Develop ideas and methods to engage people and achieve participation

10

We know that there are certain protective factors in life that provide people with a psychological “cover” and therefore reduce the likelihood of severe psychological effects when encountering hardship or suffering. Some protective factors are:

- _____ (19) to a caring family or community.
- Maintaining traditions and cultures.
- Having a strong religious belief or political ideology.

Protective factors for children also include

- Stable emotional relationship with adults.
- Social support both within and from outside the family.

Community responders can help strengthen these protective factors by empowering people and giving them a sense of control and predictability over their lives. This can be done by acknowledging that people are not helpless and by setting up structures that allow people to participate in community activities. In other words, it can be done by building on or strengthening resources in the communities.

Once the resources have been identified in the community, the next step is to _____ (20) the resources and strengthen the community's own capacities.

Steps in Action Planning

1. Identify the vision or goal
2. _____ (21) possible actions
3. Weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each action
4. Determine resources needed for each option
5. Choose an acceptable plan of action

6. Decide who will do what, when, where and how
7. Establish a time frame and criteria to evaluate success

11

Module 5 – Populations with Special Needs Notes

Groups with Special Needs

The characteristics of a vulnerable group influence their responses and needs.

- Children
- Older persons
- Persons with disabilities (physical/mental illness/substance abuse/developmental)
- People with past traumatic experiences
- Ethnic and cultural groups
- Parents with dependent children
- Bereaved spouses or partners
- Economically disadvantaged groups
- Socially disadvantaged groups
- First responders/disaster response personnel

Children

Listen to what children say both in words and through their behavior. Observe what children do as you talk to them or as they play.

- Children's Typical Responses
 - o Fear and anxiety
 - o "Childish" or regressive behavior
 - o Difficulty sleeping
 - o Physical reactions
 - o "Trigger" responses
 - o Difficulty concentrating or thinking

Learning Objectives

- Identify and describe the characteristic reactions of vulnerable groups affected by disaster
- Describe effective interventions to assist vulnerable groups

12

- Helping a Child
 - o Help by helping the parents
 - o Keep familiar (22)
 - o Talk about what happened (as appropriate)
 - o Find opportunities for children to participate in decision-making
- When a Specialist is Needed

If you have any doubts at all about whether the child may need more assistance, seek further information – talk to your supervisor, colleagues or someone in the community that knows the child.

Seek professional help if a child is experiencing any of the following reactions for longer than one month following a critical event:

- (23) or homicidal ideation/behavior
- Hopelessness/helplessness
- Unable to stop thinking about the event
- Physical problems
- Alcohol or drug use
- Hyperactivity (does not include previously identified ADHD)

Older Persons

- Older People's Typical Reactions
 - o Wish to connect with past friends
 - o Increased dependence on family, refusing assistance from authorities
 - o Fear of mortality
 - o Negative view of the future
 - o Regression
 - o Use of denial as a normal defensive reaction
 - o Immediate fear response, followed by anger and frustration
 - o Concentration and communication difficulties
 - o Physiological responses

13

- Helping Older People
 - o Ensure (24)
 - o Give factual information
 - o Reassure by providing information about normal reactions
 - o Be supportive and build confidence
 - o Identify secure attachments and relationships
 - o Talk about the event
 - o Be aware of cultural backgrounds
 - o Facilitate access to aid and support services
 - o Ensure that they are not isolated
 - o Establish routine
 - o Provide opportunities for continuity, culture and history
 - o Help them to maintain their sense of community and preserve cohesion

Persons with Disabilities (Physical/Mental Illness/Substance Abuse/Developmental)

People who have a disability are "people first". Their needs and reactions are going to be the same needs and reactions as others. However, while their reactions may be typical, sometimes their disabilities and the problems associated with their disability can create special challenges for both the person and those who work with them.

After a disaster, people with disabilities:

1. May need assistance in negotiating the "second disaster", applying for assistance from aid agencies
2. May need some accommodations within shelters
3. May need assistance in replacing lost prescriptions

- When to seek advice

Always link with existing services for their disabilities

Seek advice if these are evident or suspected:

- Suicidal ideation
- Homicidal ideation
- (25) lasting longer than two weeks
- Active hallucinations or delusions
- Rage
- Aggression
- Inability to care for self or carry out activities of daily living

14

Module 6 – Helping the Helpers Notes

Stress is inherent in disaster situations. Apart from the usual job stress, the following situations constitute additional challenges for helpers:

- Being part of the collective crisis
- Repeated exposure to grim experiences
- Carrying out physically difficult, exhausting or dangerous tasks
- Lacking sleep and feeling fatigued
- Facing the perceived inability to ever do enough
- Feeling guilt over privileged access to food, shelter, etc.
- Facing moral and (26) dilemmas
- Being exposed to anger and lack of gratitude
- Being detached from personal support systems
- Feeling frustrated by policies and decisions of supervisors

“Burnout” or High Stress Levels

Burnout may occur after a prolonged period of time on a job or even a short time in a very intense situation. It implies that the stress factors have taken over, and that the helpers are no longer able to distance themselves from the situation.

Warning signs of Burnout

- Wounded ideals
- Cynicism
- Feeling unappreciated or betrayed by organization
- Loss of enthusiasm
- Grandiose beliefs about own importance
- Heroic but reckless behavior
- Neglecting personal safety and physical needs
- Mistrusting colleagues and supervisor
- Antisocial behavior
- Excessive tiredness
- Inability to (27)
- Symptoms of illness or disease
- Sleep difficulties
- Inefficiency
- Excessive use of alcohol, tobacco or drugs

Learning Objectives

- Describe how reactions to stress may affect helpers
- Give details of warning signs of stress or burnout among helpers
- Describe how to provide psychological support to helpers
- Give details of self-care methods for helpers

15

Caring for the psychological needs of the helpers

The needs of helpers are very similar to those directly affected. A supportive environment is one of the many crucial factors in minimizing stress. This can be achieved in the following ways:

- Guidance and support from managers and peers should be accessible on a daily basis or soon after the event
- Open and sharing organizational culture
- Regular and frequent staff meetings which bring all staff together and foster a feeling of belonging to a team
- Respect for confidentiality so that people can feel safe in admitting to feeling stressed and requesting help
- Creation of peer support system
- Have (28) together

Self-Help Techniques

- Know the normal reactions to stressful events
- Be aware of your tension and consciously try to relax
- Use the (29) system
- Talk to someone you trust and with whom feel at ease
- Listen to what people close to you say and think about the event
- Work on routine tasks if it is too difficult to concentrate on demanding duties
- If you cannot sleep or feel too anxious, discuss this with someone you can trust
- Express your feelings in ways other than talking
- Do not self-medicate
- Go easy on yourself
- Avoid inflated or perfectionistic expectations
- Seek professional advice if reactions continue

Role of Supervisors

Supervisors can provide helpers with someone they can call on for additional guidance or information to solve the problems of others, or more personally with problems they may be facing.

- Support emotional and developmental needs of helpers
- Identify limitations on how far helpers should be pushed or stretched
- Act as source of advice and help with problems

16

Module 7 – De-escalation Notes

Anxiety

- Anxiety is a state of intense apprehension, uncertainty, and fear resulting from the anticipation of a threatening event or situation

- Anxiety is completely normal and appropriate in an extreme situation
- Anxiety can sometimes escalate to anger or agitation

Communication and Empathy Skills

- L-Shape Stance - This stance is important to use when working with people who may be upset.
 - o Demonstrates respect
 - o Decreases confrontation
- Warmth - Helping someone stay calm is often easier if you appear warm and approachable. No one wants to talk to someone who is staring at them coldly, or who seems indifferent.
 - o SOLER
 - S = Sit squarely
 - O = Open Posture
 - L = Lean Forward
 - E = Eye Contact
 - R = (30)
 - o Soft tone
 - o Smile
 - o Interested facial expression
 - o Open/welcoming gestures
 - o Allow the person you are talking with to dictate the spatial distance between you

Learning Objectives

- Demonstrate communication skills that can be used to calm anxious or agitated individuals
- Understand common signs of escalating anxiety
- Identify effective methods of de-escalating anxious or agitated behavior

17

- Door Openers
 - o There are a variety of ways to help people feel comfortable enough to talk with you.
 - Then what happened?
 - Then what did you do?
 - That is really interesting.

Pairing door-openers with appropriate non-verbal communication helps others to talk about their feelings.

- Non-Verbal Communication - Here are some examples of non-verbal communication that encourages people to talk:
 - o SOLER
 - o Head nodding
 - o Close proximity with the L-shaped stance
 - o Avoiding impersonal or "cold" stares
 - o Focusing on the speaker, not on the paperwork

- o Appropriate facial expressions
- Para-verbal Communication
 - o Para-verbal communication is (31) we say something, not what we say
 - o The three components of para-verbal communication are:
 - Voice Tone
 - Voice Volume
 - Rate of Speech
- Congruence
 - o Congruence means that our words and actions communicate the same thing and form a clear message. Congruency will help:
 - Denote trustworthiness
 - Show others that we care
 - Show we are in control
- Active Listening

In active listening we listen and respond to another person in a way that:

 - o Emphasizes that we are attending
 - o Improves communication
 - o Shows empathy
 - o Reflects what the other person is saying
 - o Does NOT offer (32)

Active listening is a skill that can be learned. There is a set structure to active listening that must be practiced to avoid sounding wooden and unnatural.

1. Attend to the speaker completely
2. Repeat, in your own words (paraphrase) what you heard the speaker say
 - a. This does NOT mean you agree with what they said.
3. Speaker then gives feedback to the listener as to whether what they heard was accurate.

18

- Paraphrase/Reflection – Rephrasing or reflecting what the speaker says to help clarify or insure you hear what the speaker is trying to say

Active listening becomes more difficult, and even more necessary, when the two parties are from different cultures.

To resolve a cultural conflict:

1. Be aware that culture may be a factor.
2. Be willing to work on the cultural issues.
3. Be willing to talk about how the other person's culture would address this problem.
4. Develop a solution (33)
5. If there is confusion or a misunderstanding...talk about it and learn from each other.

De-escalation Skills

- Sometimes, despite our best attempts at active listening, people become agitated.
 - o This is their reaction to an extremely abnormal situation, and it has nothing to do with you.

- Elements of Escalation
 - o Challenging authority or questioning
 - o Refusal to follow directions
 - o Loss of (34), becoming verbally agitated
 - o Becoming threatening
- Elements of De-escalation
 - o Establish a relationship
 - o Use concrete questions to help the person focus
 - o Come to an agreement on something
 - o Speak to the person with respect
 - o Don't make global statements about the person's character
 - o Use "I" statements
 - o Lavish praise is not believable

The most important thing to remember when working with someone who is agitated is that you must look and act (34) even if you are not.

19

Psychological First Aid Notes Answers

- (1) Normal
- (2) Psychological
- (3) Suffering
- (4) Accelerate
- (5) Harm
- (6) Stress
- (7) Stress
- (8) Grief
- (9) Numbness
- (10) Protect
- (11) Rapport
- (12) Cultural
- (13) Non-verbal
- (14) Active
- (15) Open ended
- (16) Relax
- (17) Suicide
- (18) Joint
- (19) Belonging
- (20) Mobilize
- (21) Brainstorm
- (22) Routines
- (23) Suicidal
- (24) Safety
- (25) Depression
- (26) Ethical

- (27) Concentrate
- (28) Fun
- (29) Buddy
- (30) Relax
- (31) How
- (32) Advice
- (33) Together
- (34) Control
- (35) Calm