

NCCTS Leadership:

Psychological First Aid

The *Psychological First Aid (PFA) Field Operations Guide (Second Edition)* was developed by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN) and the National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (NCPTSD) to address the needs and concerns of children, adolescents, adults, and families during the first hours and days after disasters or large-scale traumatic events. Developed with funding from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Service Administration, PFA is an evidence-informed intervention designed to reduce initial distress and foster short- and long-term adaptive functioning and coping. It includes eight core actions: Contact and Engagement, Safety and Comfort, Stabilization, Information Gathering, Practical Assistance, Connection with Social Supports, Information on Coping, and Linkage with Collaborative Services. The comprehensive PFA guide includes practical strategies to assist survivors in each of these core areas, as well as informative, skill-based handouts for survivors. PFA is widely available to disaster responders, school counselors, community religious professionals, and others who provide immediate support to survivors after traumatic events.

Since launching the PFA guide, the National Center for Child Traumatic Stress (NCCTS) has taken the lead on disseminating, training, and promoting adoption of PFA. To date, NCCTS has formed linkages with key organizations and stakeholders, such as the US Medical Reserve Corps, the US Public Health Corps, the Healthcare Chaplaincy, and the World Health Organization. NCCTS has also worked with numerous states (e.g., Connecticut, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, and Ohio) to train their state disaster teams to implement PFA. Several agencies and organizations have also modified and adapted PFA for use in their own incident command structures (e.g., US Department of Education, several public health preparedness centers, and the American Red Cross).

Accomplishments

Development and Dissemination of the PFA Guide: NCCTS and NCPTSD launched the first edition of the *Psychological First Aid Field Operations Guide* immediately after Hurricane Katrina in 2005. In 2006, following input from focus groups and an online survey, a second edition was launched. As of 2009, there have been over 50,000 downloads of PFA from the NCTSN and NCPTSD websites, with an additional 10,000 copies of the guide distributed at professional conferences and to state and local agencies and organizations.

Adaptations and Translations: NCCTS has worked closely with governmental and non-governmental organizations (in the US and abroad) to adapt PFA for various service systems. In particular, NCCTS led the adaptation of PFA for community-based religious professionals. NCCTS worked with the Ohio Department of Mental Health University Linkages Committee to develop a version for universities and colleges and with the Medical Reserve Corps on an adaptation for their use. NCCTS commissioned a newly released Spanish translation of PFA, and has worked with professionals from different countries on translations into Japanese, German, Swedish, and Italian. After the May 2008 earthquake in China's Sichuan province, NCCTS worked with professionals to obtain the Mandarin and simplified Chinese translations of PFA, which were put on the NCTSN website within one week of the disaster. In a two-month time span, over 10,000 copies of these translated guides were downloaded from the NCTSN website. The simplified Chinese version was also published by a Chinese publishing house and over 10,000 copies were distributed to the earthquake region.

Training: As of April 2009, NCCTS had completed over 200 PFA trainings around the US, training well over 5,000 disaster responders. In addition, NCCTS staff have made over 50 presentations on PFA at professional meetings. NCCTS developed a standardized face-to-face training for PFA that incorporates a DVD series entitled *Crisis in the Aftermath of Disasters*. These video vignettes, developed by NCTSN and NCPTSD, demonstrate evidence-based intervention strategies with children and adults after a terrorist event or disaster. In partnership with the National Association of County and City Health Officials, NCCTS has developed a "Train-the-Trainer" program for the Medical Reserve Corps, and is providing ongoing assistance to the over 150 trainers certified to date. The Medical Reserve Corps has over 176,000 volunteers. Many Medical Reserve Corps units now mandate PFA training for their members.

To date, NCCTS has completed over 200 PFA trainings and trained more than 5,000 disaster responders.

PFA Learning Community: NCCTS developed a PFA Learning Community to promote adoption by a variety of organizations and agencies that participate in disaster response and to increase sustainability of PFA practices within these organizations. Through this framework, faculty work together with providers from various parts of the country and with varying experiences to address the importance of improving PFA practices, training, and evaluation. This format provides ongoing support for PFA providers as they use the skills in the field, and it provides assistance in achieving organizational change within the providers' home agencies to ensure continued support and utilization of PFA. The Learning Community also has a trainer track for 12 members to become master PFA trainers.

Vision for the Future

Adaptations and Translations: NCCTS and NCTSN will continue to adapt PFA for use in different cultural, organizational, and service settings. Current projects include adapting PFA for use by schools, healthcare systems, Community Emergency Response Teams, and programs working with homeless youth and families. In addition, NCCTS and NCTSN will develop materials to aid those responding to public health emergencies, including pandemic flu.

Comprehensive Training Center: NCCTS will enhance its comprehensive training program with additions that include an e-learning course, which will provide foundational skills necessary to effectively implement PFA. NCCTS will also establish supplemental advanced courses that will enable PFA providers to interact and maintain their skills through our NCTSN Learning Center (<http://learn.nctsn.org/>). These online trainings will provide didactic, formal instruction from faculty, as well as experiential exercises that will require the provider to select appropriate core actions and responses to various situations presented in video clips.

Evaluation: NCCTS will continue to expand the evidence base for PFA by having newly trained PFA providers evaluate their level of knowledge of the PFA protocol and skills, their attitudes in regard to the usefulness of the training, and their beliefs about how well prepared they are to provide PFA. For online trainings and the Learning Community, simulators or case vignettes will be used to evaluate how well trainees have learned the skills taught. Additional measures have been developed to evaluate fidelity to the PFA protocol and survivor satisfaction that can be employed in field settings and in disaster drills. Evaluation of the implementation and effectiveness of PFA will occur after its use, including surveying providers to assess their perceptions of challenges, strengths, and needs for further training. Survivors receiving PFA will be asked to provide their thoughts about the usefulness of PFA and recommendations for improving the services. Organizational leaders will be asked to evaluate how well PFA was incorporated into their agency or organization response.

Partnerships and Policy: NCCTS will continue working to improve access and the quality of care available to survivors of disaster and large-scale traumas by developing partnerships with professional organizations, governmental agencies, and accreditation bodies to increase the impact and utility of PFA at the local, state, national, and international levels. These partnerships will help to increase awareness of the need for comprehensive, organized programs that integrate psychosocial care and to increase the number of emergency response programs that incorporate PFA.

Seamless Model of Disaster Mental Health: NCCTS will advance its public mental health model by developing and evaluating intervention and treatment approaches for survivors and responders at various points in recovery. For example, NCCTS is working with NCPTSD and several NCTSN centers to develop *Skills for Psychological Recovery*, an intervention designed to teach effective coping skills to survivors who experience distress and adjustment difficulties in the weeks, months, and years following disaster.