

The Hub — ILGA Europe

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How to Give Psychological First Aid (PFA)

Psychological First Aid (PFA) describes a humane, supportive response to a fellow human being who is suffering and who may need support. In this card we give you a guide to providing PFA, without professional training.

LGBTI people have suffered and continue to be subject to hate crimes on a constant basis in many regions. The injuries from attacks on us are not just physical. These events also cause psychological trauma that can have lasting damage. However, if traumatised people experience that they are not alone and that there is someone who cares, many of them can cope better. Some people will need professional assistance, but many people can cope if they are supported by a caring human being. This short guide will be helpful for you and your team in preparing the work with community members, to give them the most reliable support in moments of distress.

PFA: The Basics

Psychological First Aid (PFA) describes a humane, supportive response to a fellow human being who is suffering and who may need support. First developed to help survivors of disasters and terrorist attacks, PFA draws on human resilience and aims to reduce stress systems and help those who are affected recover.

Note: It is not professional psychotherapy, so you do not need a degree in order to provide PFA!

PFA provides emotional support and helps people address immediate basic needs, find information, services, social support, and moreover help them feel less overwhelmed and alone. (It should be noted that some people will need much more than PFA alone. Know your limits and ask for help from others who can provide specific professional assistance.)

The 3 steps of PFA

1. Approach someone in distress
2. Assess what help the persons in distress might need
3. Help them obtain that support

The 3 action principles of PFA

Look

In a crisis situation, what should you look for?

- Check for safety
- Check for people with obvious urgent basic needs
- Check for people with serious distress reactions

Listen

How can you find ways to help?

- Approach people who may need support
- Ask about people's needs and concerns
- Listen to people, and help them feel calm

Link

What can you do to link people with information and practical support?

- Help people address basic needs and access services
- Help people cope with problems
- Give information
- Connect people with loved ones and social support

The core principles of PFA

When you approach a distressed person, you should take the following steps:

1. Introduce yourself by name
2. Ask the person if they would like to talk
3. Protect the distressed person from further harm by moving to a safer place if needed
4. Offer the distressed person some comfort (for example, some water)
5. Listen and stay near the person, without forcing them to talk
6. Take the time to listen
7. Identify the person's needs and concerns
8. Reflect back to the person what you heard
9. Acknowledge the person's emotions
10. Provide necessary information
11. Offer to help connect the person with their family members /social support/ necessary services

You should always respect people's...

Safety

- Avoid putting people at further risk of harm as a result of your actions
- Make sure, to the best of your ability, that the people you help are safe and protect them from physical or psychological harm

Dignity

- Treat people with respect and according to their cultural and social norms

Rights

- Make sure people can access help fairly and without discrimination
- Help people claim their rights and access available support
- Act only in the best interest of any person you encounter

When helping:

- Be honest and trustworthy
- Respect people's right to make their own decisions
- Respect privacy and keep the person's story confidential, if this is appropriate
- Be aware of and set aside your own biases and prejudices
- Make it clear to people that even if they refuse help now, they can still access help in the future
- Behave appropriately by considering the person's culture, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression and sex characteristics

When going to help in a crisis, consider the advantages of working in a team or in pairs. Working in teams will help you to have support and back-up in difficult situations and is important for your own security. You can also be more effective in a team. For example, one person can stay with someone who is distressed while the other person can focus on finding special professional help, if needed. If possible, try to have a "buddy system" where you and a fellow helper can check in with each other for support and help.

PFA and your own wellbeing

Helping responsibly also means taking care of your own health and wellbeing. As a helper, you may be affected by what you experience in a crisis situation, or by the emotional stories of the survivors. It is important to pay extra attention to your own wellbeing and be sure that you are physically and emotionally able to help others. If working in a team, be aware of the wellbeing of your fellow helpers as well. Take care of yourself so that you can best care for others.

Other resources

You can take an online course in PFA [here](#). If you are not sure about your listening

skills, it is important to develop them additionally.