

**Listen, Protect, and
Connect:
Family to Family, Neighbor to
Neighbor**

**PSYCHOLOGICAL
FIRST AID (PFA) FOR
THE COMMUNITY HELPING EACH
OTHER**



**Helping those around you in times of
disaster.**

If an emergency happens or disaster strikes, those around us—our family, friends, and neighbors—are often the first ones to offer help.



You may be close with your family and friends. With neighbors, you may just nod or wave from across the street or share family activities and information. No matter how well you know the people living near you, after a disaster, family, friends, and neighbors can turn to each other for all types of support. In fact, the help we give and get from each other can let us bounce back from a disaster faster and help our recovery.

You can help those around you in a disaster or emergency when you:

Listen, Protect, and Connect

These are the three steps of **“Psychological First Aid”** for helping each other. Psychological first aid means helping with someone’s emotional and mental health. Just as people learn CPR or first aid to help during certain medical crises, knowing how to help someone mentally and emotionally can be one of the most important things you can do for your family, friends, and neighbors’ well-being after a disaster.

Support from each other is often the first thing we seek after disasters and it works!

Getting Started: Understanding the Effects of a Disaster

Direct experience: “Direct experience” means physically experiencing or directly seeing the event as it happens.

Thoughts and emotions: After a disaster, we may have changes in our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

- ◆ We may not “feel like ourselves.”
- ◆ Worry is one of the most common reactions. We may worry about our family, friends, and even our pets. We may worry about how the event affects our neighborhood and our community and if it will happen again.
- ◆ At times, we may be angry because of what happened.
- ◆ Sometimes guilty thoughts and feeling ashamed over things we’ve done or not done are also common.

Our worries may not always seem logical but sometimes they are still there.

Common reactions to disasters:

- ◆ Trouble sleeping
- ◆ Problems at work
- ◆ Irritation with family, friends, or co-workers
- ◆ Trouble listening
- ◆ Not finishing work, school assignments, or chores
- ◆ It may be harder to concentrate and pay attention
- ◆ Becoming upset, sad, or angry more easily

After the disaster as people try to help with recovery, the demands on our time and attention may grow and this can add to our stress.



If you or those around you have direct experience with a disaster, some contributing factors can make it harder to cope or recover.

Contributing factors include:

- Death of a family member or friend
- Seeing serious injury or the death of another person
- Missing family members
- Getting hurt or becoming sick due to the disaster
- Worrying about becoming sick
- Being unable to evacuate quickly or becoming trapped
- Losing your home, having to move or family members having to move, changing schools or neighborhoods, losing your job and/or losing of belongings
- Having past traumatic experiences
- Losing a pet
- Dealing with financial burdens

(source: PsySTART)

If your family, friends, or neighbors have had one or more of these happen to them, you can follow the steps in this booklet to help them. You may also consider suggesting that they talk to their doctor, priest, or other professional—especially if it's making their day to day life harder.

Now that you know some of the common reactions and factors that can affect others after a disaster, you're ready to

LISTEN, PROTECT, and CONNECT!

1. Listen, Protect, and Connect

One of the first steps to help those around us after a disaster is to **listen** to what they say and how they act. Sometimes people may not want to talk about their feelings out loud or they may become more quiet or stay away from others. They may avoid talking about what happened or become more scared and sad. Sometimes they may seem irritated and hard to be around. If you notice these reactions, you need to listen to them even more.

Let those you care about know you are willing to listen and talk about what happened. It helps to know that someone is there to listen and turn to for support and advice. After a disaster or emergency, you may want to reach out and listen, but often don't know *what* to say to start the conversation. You can use the following ideas as a guide.

- ◆ **Make the first move.** This may mean just ‘checking in’ to see how they are doing. Being close by to someone lets them feel that they are not alone.

- ◆ **Take time to talk.** Letting your neighbors know that you want to listen is often enough to get a conversation started. You can say, “I’m here if you want to talk.” As they talk, remember, that there are no right or wrong feelings.

- ◆ **Understand silence is OK.** Sometimes people aren’t ready or don’t want to talk. Try not to push them. Sometimes just spending time and being with someone is enough. They may not wish to talk, but it is important that your family and friends around you do not feel alone after a disaster.

- ◆ **Share reactions** that your family and friends may have during and after a disaster. Sharing them with others can help them feel that you understand and that you can be someone they can turn to when needed. Sharing this information can also help others understand they are not different from everyone else and that you all may have many of these reactions in common. This in itself can be very helpful.
- ◆ **Check back often.** After you have listened to your family and friends' concerns, it is important to check back and see if you can help with anything else that may come up. Let those around you know you are there if needed. Just knowing that you are there and care can really make a difference.



Listen, 2. Protect, and Connect

You can help your family, friends, and neighbors feel better protected and help them recover by doing some or all of the following:

- ◆ **Help them locate the basics** like food, water, clothing, supplies, or access to services they may need.
- ◆ **Answer questions about what happened** simply and honestly and with updated information. This can help protect from feelings and thoughts of uncertainty. It's OK if you don't always know the answers, especially since new information can be released many times a day.



- ◆ **Support their actions.** They may feel that they could or should have done something else or are not doing enough after the disaster. Help protect their feelings of worth by letting them know their actions are appreciated.

- ◆ You may be the first to help or the first one being helped. Learn what is in place and what is coming up in your neighborhood in response to the disaster. Share what you learn.

- ◆ Show those around you ways they have coped positively in the past. Help them think through what has worked for them—build on success. Remind them that their ideas and strategies have worth. When they believe that their efforts are effective, they are likely to do better.

- ◆ It's often helpful for people to continue to practice and find comfort in their faith traditions. Encourage your family, friends, and neighbors to reach out to spiritual care leaders or their faith-based community for support.

- ◆ **Limit exposure** (direct and media coverage) to the disaster. Taking a break from watching TV, radio, or the news can reduce stress. Also, be aware of your conversations about the disaster and the response. **What's not upsetting to you may upset others.**
- ◆ **Encourage healthy behaviors** such as getting rest, relaxing, eating well, and taking time to focus on non-disaster related activities. Even in a disaster, these behaviors are important and can protect others from feeling overwhelmed.
- ◆ **Develop a safety plan** for the future and suggest others to do so as well. Having a plan helps protect and lessen worries about another disaster. Ideas for safety plans can be found at: http://www.ready.gov/kids/_downloads/familyplan.pdf.

Listen, Protect, and 3. Connect



Providing a sense of support and connection to others is perhaps the most important thing anyone can do after a disaster. Reaching out to family, friends, co-workers and neighbors can help you and those around you bounce back from a disaster. Consider ways to make some or all of the following connections:

- ◆ If you can, offer help for people's immediate needs such as food, water, a place to stay, etc.
- ◆ **Identify and share information** about resources that can help with you and your loved ones' needs. Disaster-related groups are a good source of information, but also faith-based groups, mental health services, American Red Cross, government agencies, and others can be very helpful.

- ◆ Offer a lending hand for what people around you seem to need most. You can:
 - ◇ Take them to a shelter or disaster recovery center
 - ◇ Take them to a medical appointment
 - ◇ Go with them to meetings with insurance or disaster relief agencies
 - ◇ Help them clean up after a disaster
 - ◇ Help them re-connect with their religious and spiritual community

- ◆ Share cell phones, e-mail access, and other ways to communicate with others outside of the disaster area.

- ◆ Resources may be limited at first or for a while. You can work together with your family, friends, and neighbors by:
 - ◇ Taking turns watching each other's children
 - ◇ Sharing transportation (and carpooling when possible)

- ◇ Sharing information about resources and safety during and after the disaster
 - ◇ Sharing food, especially when it can easily spoil
 - ◇ Sharing tools for clean-up efforts
 - ◇ Sharing the Listen, Protect, and Connect booklet with others
- ◆ Consider connecting with police, fire, and rescue workers and other community resources like American Red Cross volunteers. You can talk to them and thank them for their efforts. Doing this helps them feel appreciated and also helps you recover faster by making these connections. Get children in the neighborhood involved. They can write or draw pictures, or find other ways to show their appreciation.
 - ◆ You can brainstorm ideas that connect you, your family, friends, and neighbors with the community. Review your ideas for connecting over the few weeks after a disaster. Consider how you can continue to connect with others over time.

Remember, we are all in this together!

Remember...

As you are helping those around you with the **Listen, Protect, and Connect** efforts, **you** are also impacted by the disaster. Taking care of yourself is a very important step.

Make sure to:

- ◆ Share your thoughts and feelings with friends or loved ones, if you can
- ◆ Identify resources for yourself
- ◆ Take a break from disaster-related activities and find ways to enjoy time with your family, friends, and neighbors (or even take a little time for yourself)



Seek a doctor's or professional's help if you, your family, or neighbor:

- ✓ Checked off any of the contributing factors mentioned earlier.
- ✓ Acts differently than usual and behavior does not get better over time.
- ✓ Feel overwhelmed or overly stressed for a long period of time.
- ✓ Are not sure about how to handle a situation with members in the community.

**Listen, Protect and
Connect and
EXPECT
RECOVERY.**



For More Information

Please visit
www.ready.gov

Ready is a national public service advertising campaign produced by The Advertising Council in partnership with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The *Ready* Campaign is designed to educate and empower Americans to prepare for and respond to emergencies, including natural disasters and potential terrorist attacks.

**For more information on Listen, Protect, Connect :
Family to Family, Neighbor to Neighbor
Psychological First Aid for the Community Helping
Each Other Developed by Merritt Schreiber, Ph.D.
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For more information, please visit **www.ready.gov**

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