Psychological First Aid and Process Management

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Situations Requiring Psychological First Aid

- Natural Disasters (earthquake, flood, wild life fire, etc.)
- Accidents (experiencing traffic or work accident)
- Experiencing loss (death of a relative or witnessing a death)
- Wars
- Being sexually or physically assaulted
- Torture
- Abduction/Detention
- Encountering a situation that threatens life or bodily integrity or being diagnosed with a disease
There may be many more events or situations that can be called traumatic.

To distinguish trauma;

- Being a situation/event that threatens/disrupts the vital integrity of the person.
- There must be a situation/event that exceeds the person's coping skills.
These situations can be experienced in different ways:

- The person might,
  - personally experience the traumatic event.
  - witness such events, and/or might help the people who experienced the event.
  - learn that such a traumatic event happened to a loved one.
Trauma Related Symptoms

• Temporary feelings of shock, fear, anger, guilt, shame, helplessness, and hopelessness
• Freezing reactions - the state of not feeling anything
• Confusion about place-space-time
• Indecisiveness, inability to concentrate, forgetfulness, general apathy
• Nervousness, fatigue, difficulty in sleeping
• Bodily aches and pains, irregular heartbeat, nausea, change in appetite, sudden startles
• Restlessness, insecurity, withdrawal from people, sudden outbursts of anger.
• Feeling rejected or abandoned, being overly judgmental and accusatory.
• The desire to keep everything under control.
• Alienation from the body or self.
• Desire to turn to narcotic-sedative-stimulant substances.
• Repetitive thoughts or actions.
• Decreased will to live.
Survivor's Guilt

Survivor's guilt is a response to an event in which someone else experienced loss but you did not. While the name implies this to be a response to the loss of life, it could also be the loss of property, health, identity or a number of other things that are important to people.
What is Psychological First Aid?

- It is an early psychosocial intervention approach that is carried out during or after a disaster, accident, terrorist attack or any event that causes negative effects at the individual/social level (Brymer et al. 2006).

- PFA is NOT a diagnosis or treatment, it is a crisis intervention! (Ruzek et al. 2007)
Psychological First Aid

**Purposes**
- Meeting the basic physical or psychological needs of people during or after the event.
- To minimize the effects of the event on individuals and possible post-traumatic stress symptoms as much as possible.
- Supporting adaptive functioning and coping in the short and long term.
Steps of Psychological First Aid

1. Acquaintance and connection
2. Identifying basic psychological and physical needs
3. Helping meeting the needs
4. Carrying out referrals for psychiatric emergencies
5. Preventing from the long-term effects of the event
6. Facilitating normalization
7. Supporting stabilization
8. Guiding on acute traumatic stress responses
9. Supporting coping mechanisms
10. Improving resilience

(World Health Organization, 2011)
Look, Listen, Connect, Guide

Psychological First Aid,

• Is a type of support that anyone who's trained in this topic can give.
• Is applicable during and after the event.
• Is applied at the scene and in acute situations.
• Is non-intrusive, practical care and support.
• Is about putting people at ease and helping them feel calm.
• Provides the identification and elimination of needs.
• Involves listening to individuals but never forcing them to speak.
• Provides information and support.
• Protects the individual from further damage in times of crisis.
What It Is NOT?

• It is not a treatment.
• It is not counseling or psychotherapy.
• It is not a specialized PRACTICE.
• It is not a discussion about the event.
• It is not psychological meaning or psychological information to the person.
Coping Skills

• Breathing Exercises
  • Box Breathing: It is among the simplest breathing techniques. It is done by diaphragmatic breathing.
  • For this exercise, sit in a comfortable, quiet, calm place. Then take a deep breath for 4 seconds. Then hold your breath for 4 seconds. Then exhale for 4 seconds. Finally, wait 4 seconds before taking a new breath.
Coping Skills

• Connection with social supports
  Social support is considered to be a pertinent factor in the post-traumatic recovery period. Therefore, providers of psychological first aid may take up a series of activities to mobilise the already existing social support mechanisms of individuals affected by an event.

• Guiding to and informing about the resources/institutions where help can be obtained.
BASIC PH Model (Lahad, 1993)

The model suggests that we are each able to possess six potential characteristics that each represent a different style of coping, and that the more of these styles we are able to utilize, the more resilience we are able to harness in order to regain a sense of control in an otherwise terrifying situation.

- **Belief**: This can be through faith or any other shared beliefs and relies on inner core values.
- **Affect**: Expressing feelings and emotions.
- **Social**: Via support-seeking through friendships or organizations we can gain a sense of responsibility within a group which can help us to stay grounded.
- **Imagination**: Expression of thoughts and feelings in a creative manner can allow a safer feeling release of expression through art, writing, drama or music.
- **Cognitive**: Getting information
- **Physical**: Sports, dance, movement
• Improving Problem Solving Skills
  • Identify and define the problem.
  • Come up with possible solutions.
  • Evaluate the options.
  • Choose the best solution.
  • Implement the solution.
  • Evaluate the outcome.

• Encouraging positive and/or daily routine activities
• Informing people about the importance of self-care.

• Developing the ability to manage reactions:
  • Identifying the stress reaction and reminders/triggers.
  • To exemplify/remind the forms of expression with meditation, writing-speech against stressful factors.
  • Establishing a referral plan to a mental health or health professional in case of personal reactions.
Well-Being

Well-being is the experience of health, happiness, and prosperity. It includes having good mental health, high life satisfaction, a sense of meaning or purpose, and the ability to manage stress.
Maintaining Well Being

• Take care of your physical health (exercise, eat healthy, sleep well).
• Spend time with the ones you love.
• Take time out for yourself.
• Try expressing your experiences with different tools such as writing and drawing.
• Take a break from social media.
• All of your early intervention methods, psychological first aid, coping strategies, and efforts to restore well-being may not be enough.

• In this case, seek expert support from the nearest mental health professional possible.
In acute situations;

• It is normal to have such mental-physical reactions to an abnormal event.

• The symptoms mentioned may last between 20-30 days.

• If the symptoms continue more than a month and so and continues to effect the person’s daily life, then a professional help should be seeked.
What is Normalization?

• In cases where a traumatic situation or a crisis is faced, the normalization process begins with the provision of basic needs and security.

• The normalization process does not mean getting used to or moving on as if nothing happened.

• It is necessary for the person(s) to become homeostasis, both physical and spiritual, after the situations they have been through, in order to continue living.
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