

Psychological First Aid

Tod Schimelpfenig WEMT FAWM
NOLS Wilderness Medicine

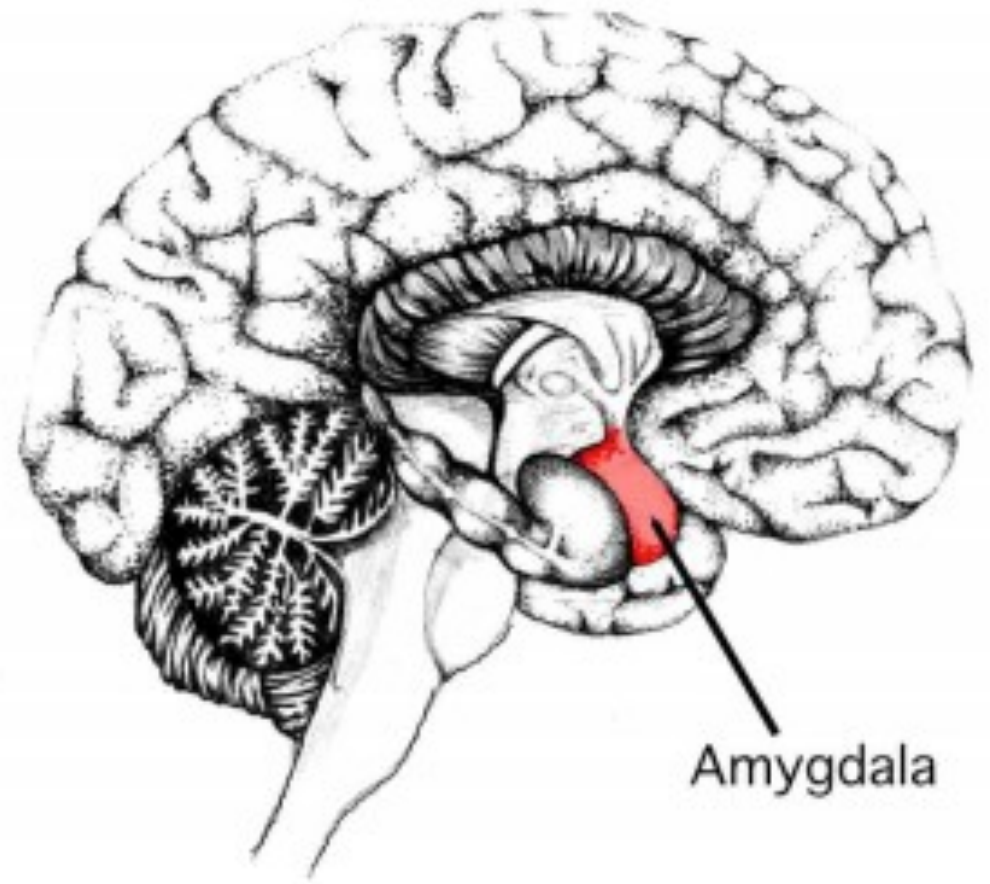
Psychological first aid (PFA) is a non-therapeutic response to a person who may need physical and emotional support immediately following an extremely stressful incident, mass violence or natural disaster.



There is an association between unrelieved early symptoms (acute stress) and long term effects or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Between 10 and 30% of people with acute stress fail to recover and develop PTSD.



One of the goals of PFA is to reduce the limbic system response to stress, hopefully allowing the patient to return to normal functions sooner and be less at risk for long term stress.

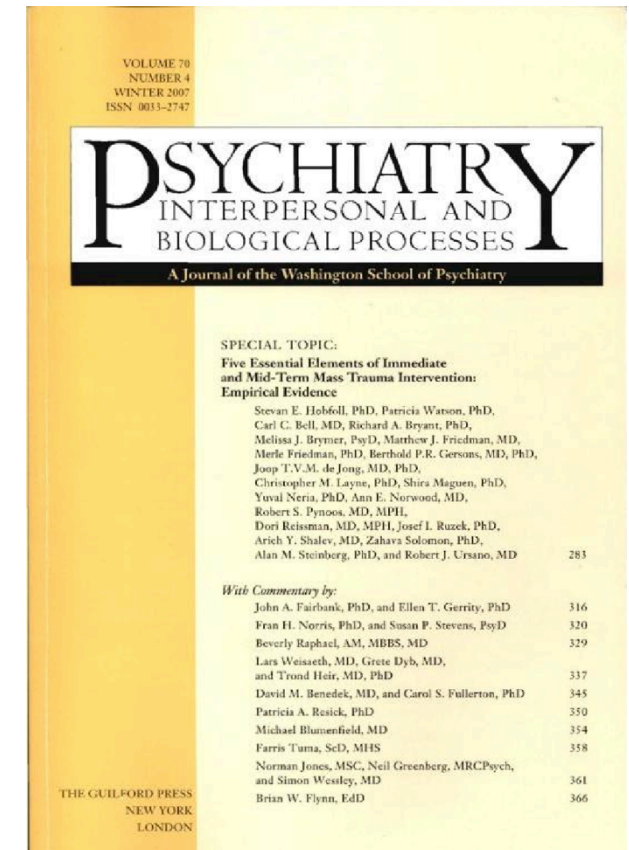


Multiple mental health, disaster and medical response organizations (WHO, ARC, VA, NIMH, etc) support the use of Stress or Psychological First Aid for victims, survivors and responders.

It's evidence-informed

Goals:

- To reduce initial distress, and thus long-term morbidity
- To foster short- and long-term adaptive functioning and coping



Create

Safety

Calm

Self efficacy

Connection

Hope



Create a sense of safety

- Reduce chaos and remove patients from perceived threats.
- Reflect evidence of safety.

Create calm

- Calm yourself.
- Emphasize the present, the practical, and the possible.

Create self and collective efficacy

- Involve the person in problem-solving, self-care, and rescue.
- Recognize and remind people of existing strengths.

Create connection

- Build an on-scene relationship.
- Help people contact friends, family, loved ones (including pets).

Create hope

- Reflect specific, accurate, positive facts and predictable, realistic steps.
- Maintain and communicate hope.

5 Principles of Psychological First Aid



Concluding comments

It's pretty simple stuff

Easy to teach

We already do this stuff

Might be helpful

Unlikely to be harmful (which is why all those organizations endorse it)

It's not professional mental health

Your staff might find it a helpful tool