



**MCHC**  
Metropolitan Chicago  
Healthcare Council

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## THE CHICAGO HEALTHCARE SYSTEM COALITION FOR PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE

### Guidelines for Providing Psychological First Aid (PFA) Support in a Disaster or Emergency

#### Things to remember:

- Introduce yourself and inquire about immediate needs
- Maintain confidentiality as much as circumstances allow
- Ensure immediate physical safety
- Provide timely and accurate information about disaster response activities and services, including links and referral to additional needed services
- Attend to physical comfort (e.g. shelter, food, water, rest, etc)
- Maintain a calm and compassionate presence
- Be sensitive to issues of culture and diversity
- Consider needs of at-risk populations (e.g. children, elderly, disabled, etc)
- Be a patient and empathic listener
- Assist emotionally overwhelmed survivors
- Encourage positive coping and problem-solving
- Understand that everyone deals with stress and grief differently
- Help people connect to their friends and loved ones.

#### Things to avoid:

- Telling someone that everything will be fine and to just get over it
- Sharing your own personal experience rather than listening
- Downplaying the incident or making judgments about how a person is coping
- Imposing your personal values or religious beliefs. Beliefs and values are very personal and individual. What you find helpful may in fact be unhelpful, or even harmful or offensive, to another. Let them set the agenda for any discussion of this area.
- Sharing information that has not been validated

*Note: The above guidelines are meant to be helpful hints and do not provide comprehensive training in Psychological First Aid. We recommend that hospital personnel, first responders, and any other individuals who may provide assistance during a disaster or emergency also take a short PFA course at [www.cdphlms.com](http://www.cdphlms.com) and/or contact Dr. Nikoleta Boukydis of the Chicago Department of Public Health, at [Nikoleta.Boukydis@cityofchicago.org](mailto:Nikoleta.Boukydis@cityofchicago.org) to schedule a live, interactive training at your facility.*

Thank you very much.

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