MANAGING REACTIONS

Reach skills to help the person manage unpleasant reactions. Review the skills below with the person and ask him/her which he/she would prefer to start with.

• Calming skills: Ask the person to breathe more slowly with normal breaths. "Take a slow breath in through the nose (try not to breathe too deeply), hold for 5 seconds and then breathe out slowly through your nose or mouth while saying a soothing word like “relax” to yourself.” Ask the person to practice this for 5-15 breaths every day when he/she is not upset so that he/she will be able to use it when required.

• Putting thoughts and feelings into words: Suggest that the person write down in detail about his/ her experiences and reactions. Gather all thoughts and feelings that come to mind even if sometimes they are disturbing or distressing. Encourage the person to practice helpful thinking – replacing unhelpful thoughts with helpful thoughts.

• Recognising situations that trigger reactions: Help the person identify triggers (including reminders of the disaster) that evoke distressing reactions. Strategies to help manage such situations are:
  1. Anticipate stressful situations or reminders and make plans for them (e.g., talk beforehand, take a friend with you, plan a pleasant activity beforehand).
  2. Use problem solving to help develop a plan for managing stressful situations. This will be useful particularly for unexpected triggers.
  3. After the trigger, allow time for recovery.

HELPFUL THINKING

Identify unhelpful thoughts

The following questions may be useful in helping people identify their unhelpful thoughts:

• "What has been bothering you the most since the disaster?"

• "What are you most afraid of nowadays?"

• "What makes you feel the worst about yourself or about how your life is going?"

• "What goes through your mind when you think about the disaster and your current situation?"

Help the person see that while his/her thoughts may be unjustified or exaggerated, they are likely to return in the future, they may not be helpful, and that the situation is different from what he/she at the time. Help the person to practice the "What are you most afraid of nowadays?"

Helpful skills include asking the person to write about the situation, and then help the person identify what is helpful and unhelpful about the situation. Encourage the person to practice helpful thoughts – replacing unhelpful thoughts with helpful thoughts.

About this brochure

This brochure is a brief reference guide to Skills for Psychological Recovery (SPR). It provides an overview of the various components of SPR and describes for whom they may be useful.

Reactions to Traumatic Events

Traumatic Events are those that involve actual or threatened death or serious injury (real or perceived) to self or others (e.g., accidents, assaults, natural disasters and wars); and lead to feelings of fear, helplessness or horror. Certain events (e.g., interpersonal violence, direct threat to one’s personal safety or direct witnessing of limb amputations or more) are more likely to result in a traumatic reaction.

FUNCTIONING AND UNHELPFUL THINKING CAN REQUIRE A SUBSTANTIAL EFFORT FROM PROVIDERS. HERE IS MORE DETAIL ON HOW TO HELP PEOPLE IN THESE AREAS.

PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID (PFA)

In the immediate aftermath of trauma, psychologists should monitor the person’s mental state and provide tailored support. This includes attending to the person’s practical needs and ensuring access to an unbiased coping strategies and social supports.

SKILLS FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL RECOVERY (SPR)

Where PFA is not sufficient, the next level – SPR – is often useful. SPR is an evidence-based, informed skills-training model to help children, adolescents, adults, and families in the weeks and months after disasters and trauma. It is designed for those with low level problems that continue after the period in which PFA is offered.

SPR aims to accelerate recovery and prevent multiplicative outcomes. It is designed to reduce ongoing distress caused by traumatic events and provide skills training to assist the person in reaching their recovery goals.

SPR focuses on a few core, empirically-derived skills that have been shown to help with a variety of post-trauma issues. Following an information-gathering phase, SPR skills include problem solving, promoting protective activities, managing reactions, promoting helpful thinking, and building social connections.

Tertiary services will develop more severe psychological problems should be provided with formal psychological and/or pharmacological interventions.

KEY MESSAGES

Psychological First Aid (PFA)

In the immediate aftermath of trauma, practitioners should monitor the person’s mental state and provide tailored support. This includes attending to the person’s practical needs and ensuring access to an unbiased coping strategies and social supports.

Skills for Psychological Recovery (SPR)

Where PFA is not sufficient, the next level – SPR – is often useful. SPR is an evidence-based, informed skills-training model to help children, adolescents, adults, and families in the weeks and months after disasters and trauma. It is designed for those with low level problems that continue after the period in which PFA is offered.

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SPR focuses on a few core, empirically-derived skills that have been shown to help with a variety of post-trauma issues. Following an information-gathering phase, SPR skills include problem solving, promoting protective activities, managing reactions, promoting helpful thinking, and building social connections.

Tertiary services will develop more severe psychological problems should be provided with formal psychological and/or pharmacological interventions.
GOAL
1. Make an action plan: Determine whether survivors who are making a first contact or returning for a second can help them improve their mood and regain a sense of normalcy and control at their own pace.

RATIONALE
Disasters create many difficulties and survivors often feel overwhelmed by the stress of having to face them and their loved ones. Having a systematic way to solve problems can help survivors regain feelings of control and increase their self-efficacy.

Who/Where
Identify the people who are making a first contact or returning for a second in need of help. Make sure they are aware of the situation.

Use for:
- Building social support
- Enhancing mental health

STEPS
1. Explain rationale for information gathering
2. Encourage the person to define the problem he/she is most interested in
3. Explain how unhelpful thoughts can maintain negative emotions and distressing reactions
4. Teach skills to address priority reactions:
   - Identify helpful thoughts:
     - Helpful thoughts
     - Unhelpful thoughts
   - Identify needs.
   - Help them manage stress and cope with the situation

PROMOTING POSITIVE ACTIVITIES

GOAL
1. Encourage activities that will help survivors manage distressing reactions and emotional reactions and improve their quality of life.

RATIONALE
Disasters often disrupt normal routines and survivors are more vulnerable to distressing reactions like feeling tense and on edge. Learning new skills can help survivors regain a sense of control.

Who/Where
Identify survivors who identify distressing physical and/or emotional reactions.

Use for:
- Enhancing mental health
- Promoting healthy thinking

STEPS
1. Explore opportunities for engaging in positive activities
2. Identify when they will do the activity
3. Be sure to choose things that are realistic and manageable
4. Schedule activities in a calendar:
   - Help the person identify who is in her/his social network and who is easily accessible. This person could be a family member, friend, or someone else who is supportive.
   - Help them identify what kind of support (e.g., household help, giving advice, social activities). Then identify what kind of support they can provide.
5. Make a social support plan:
   - Make a social support plan. Choose one or more activities survivors can engage in to establish what triggers these reactions:
     - How well are you functioning in your relationships and community supports?
   - Practice daily life skills to manage distressing reactions
6. Help survivors identify the negative thoughts survivors may have:
   - A person with depression or anxiety may have negative thoughts, which are unhelpful and can maintain negative emotions and distressing reactions.

MANAGING ANXIETY, GRIEF AND LOSS

GOAL
1. Help survivors take stock of what they are doing to help themselves.
2. Establish what triggers these reactions:
3. Help them learn how to deal with these triggers
4. Encourage survivors to identify the negative thoughts survivors may have and replace them with more helpful ones.

RATIONALE
Disasters often disrupt normal routines and survivors are more vulnerable to distressing reactions like feeling tense and on edge. Learning new skills can help survivors regain a sense of control.

Who/Where
Identify survivors who are experiencing distressing physical and/or emotional reactions.

Use for:
- Enhancing mental health
- Promoting healthy thinking

STEPS
1. Explore opportunities for engaging in positive activities
2. Identify when they will do the activity
3. Be sure to choose things that are realistic and manageable
4. Schedule activities in a calendar:
   - Help the person identify who is in her/his social network and who is easily accessible. This person could be a family member, friend, or someone else who is supportive.
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   - Make a social support plan. Choose one or more activities survivors can engage in to establish what triggers these reactions:
     - How well are you functioning in your relationships and community supports?
   - Practice daily life skills to manage distressing reactions
6. Help survivors identify the negative thoughts survivors may have:
   - A person with depression or anxiety may have negative thoughts, which are unhelpful and can maintain negative emotions and distressing reactions.

PROMOTING HELPFUL THINKING

GOAL
1. Help survivors take stock of what they are doing to help themselves. Establish what triggers these reactions:
2. Help them learn how to deal with these triggers:
3. Encourage survivors to identify the negative thoughts survivors may have and replace them with more helpful ones.

RATIONALE
Disasters often disrupt normal routines and survivors are more vulnerable to distressing reactions like feeling tense and on edge. Learning new skills can help survivors regain a sense of control.

Who/Where
Identify survivors who are experiencing distressing physical and/or emotional reactions.

Use for:
- Enhancing mental health
- Promoting healthy thinking

STEPS
1. Explore opportunities for engaging in positive activities
2. Identify when they will do the activity
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4. Schedule activities in a calendar:
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   - Make a social support plan. Choose one or more activities survivors can engage in to establish what triggers these reactions:
     - How well are you functioning in your relationships and community supports?
   - Practice daily life skills to manage distressing reactions
6. Help survivors identify the negative thoughts survivors may have:
   - A person with depression or anxiety may have negative thoughts, which are unhelpful and can maintain negative emotions and distressing reactions.

REBUILDING HEALTHY SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

GOAL
1. Help survivors take stock of what they are doing to help themselves. Establish what triggers these reactions:
2. Help them learn how to deal with these triggers:
3. Encourage survivors to identify the negative thoughts survivors may have and replace them with more helpful ones.

RATIONALE
Disasters often disrupt normal routines and survivors are more vulnerable to distressing reactions like feeling tense and on edge. Learning new skills can help survivors regain a sense of control.

Who/Where
Identify survivors who are experiencing distressing physical and/or emotional reactions.

Use for:
- Enhancing mental health
- Promoting healthy thinking

STEPS
1. Explore opportunities for engaging in positive activities
2. Identify when they will do the activity
3. Be sure to choose things that are realistic and manageable
4. Schedule activities in a calendar:
   - Help the person identify who is in her/his social network and who is easily accessible. This person could be a family member, friend, or someone else who is supportive.
   - Help them identify what kind of support (e.g., household help, giving advice, social activities). Then identify what kind of support they can provide.
5. Make a social support plan:
   - Make a social support plan. Choose one or more activities survivors can engage in to establish what triggers these reactions:
     - How well are you functioning in your relationships and community supports?
   - Practice daily life skills to manage distressing reactions
6. Help survivors identify the negative thoughts survivors may have:
   - A person with depression or anxiety may have negative thoughts, which are unhelpful and can maintain negative emotions and distressing reactions.

SEVERE STRESS

GOAL
1. Help survivors take stock of what they are doing to help themselves. Establish what triggers these reactions:
2. Help them learn how to deal with these triggers:
3. Encourage survivors to identify the negative thoughts survivors may have and replace them with more helpful ones.

RATIONALE
Disasters often disrupt normal routines and survivors are more vulnerable to distressing reactions like feeling tense and on edge. Learning new skills can help survivors regain a sense of control.

Who/Where
Identify survivors who are experiencing distressing physical and/or emotional reactions.

Use for:
- Enhancing mental health
- Promoting healthy thinking

STEPS
1. Explore opportunities for engaging in positive activities
2. Identify when they will do the activity
3. Be sure to choose things that are realistic and manageable
4. Schedule activities in a calendar:
   - Help the person identify who is in her/his social network and who is easily accessible. This person could be a family member, friend, or someone else who is supportive.
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