

For people who have experienced disasters, accidents, crimes, and so on

Mental Injury Healthcare Guide

~Distress Symptoms and Coping Skills~



Published by:

Toyonaka City Mental Health Promotion Network

< Consultation >

Symptoms may occur several weeks or even several years after the crisis event. If you feel signs of mental disorder, don't try to cope with them by yourself but consult specialists.



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○ [Consultation Service on Mental Health]

Mental Health Sec., Medical Assistance Div.,
Toyonaka City Public Health Center 4-11-1, Naka-Sakurazuka, Toyonaka City

☎06-6152-7315

Hours: 9:00 – 17:15

(Except Sat., Sun, & national holidays)

※We can also connect you to a more specialized consultant about the event or problem which affects you. First, contact us.

※ For a face-to-face consultation, please make an appointment in advance.

References
WHO: Psychological First Aid: Guide for field workers
Save the Children: Children's mental healthcare in emergency
Psychological First Aid for children

■ Do minds also get injured?

If you are exposed to sudden and shocking events such as disasters, accidents, and crimes, your mind will be severely damaged. The mental injury is called trauma.

As shown on the right-hand page, mental injuries may cause a variety of reactions in your mind, body, and behavior. **These are normal reactions that anybody can experience**, but the symptoms vary from person to person.

■ How will you recover?

In most cases, the reactions resolve on their own with time.

It is important to take care of your mind and body, to keep your own pace, and not to work too hard.

However, if the symptoms last for more than a month and you find it difficult to lead a normal daily life, you may need medical attention. Do not put up with them alone but talk to a mental health professional.

If your mind is injured, various signs (distress reactions) will appear.

● Mental responses

- Startled by noises • Irritability • Anger • Self-blame
- Sudden fear • Anxiety • Alienation • Nightmare
- Feeling guilty • Feeling helpless • Lack of reality
- Emotional numbness • Overly excited

● Physical Responses

- Headache, stiff shoulders • Palpitations • Tremors
- Sweating • Nausea, diarrhea, stomach pain • Difficulty breathing • Fatigue • Sleeping too much or too little
- Loss of appetite or overeating

● Changes in lifestyle and behavior

- Difficulty concentrating • Impaired judgment • Impaired memory • Recluse • Loss of interest • Non-responsiveness
- Verbosity • Silence • Hyperactivity
- Resist authority • Violent

They are normal reactions that may happen to anyone. It may take some time before they subside.

What can you do for recovery?

● Keep to your own pace.

- The reactions can happen to anybody, but the speed of recovery varies from person to person. Do not push yourself.

● Put your feelings into words.

- Don't keep in your natural emotions but express them in words.

● Take good care of yourself

- Rest well.
- Try to do moderate physical activities (exercising, walking etc.).

● Maintain communications and share your feelings.

- By opening up about your feelings to somebody close and trustworthy, you will get mental balance. By sharing painful feelings with others who suffered similar experiences, you will feel better.

● Relaxation

- Relaxation activities such as breathing exercises, stretching exercises, yoga, listening to music, and spending time in nature will give you peace of mind.

★ Children may enjoy blowing bubbles instead of breathing exercises to practice slow and deep breathing



Children react, behave, and think differently from adults, depending on their developmental stages.

Ages
0 – 3

Unable to understand what has happened, they may overly cling to their parents or caregivers, or develop new fears. They may also change sleeping and eating habits or return to earlier behavior.

Ages
4 – 6

Children observe the reactions of their parents or caregivers and try to assess the situation. As children of this age apt to be imaginative, they may believe they caused the crisis to happen or say something unreal.

Ages
7 – 12

They may talk about the event repeatedly or express their memories through play (play earthquake, etc.) These are a part of natural reactions for children to cope with the stress. Don't try to stop them but observe them carefully.

Ages
13 –

They understand the seriousness not only from their own point of view but also from others. Many of them show a strong sense of responsibility and guilt. They may have negligent attitudes, avoid others, behave aggressively, or lose ambitions about present and future. They also become more dependent on their mates.

What parents and other adults should do -----

Understand the child's stress signs correctly and cope with them properly

- Accept the signs as natural reactions. Don't panic but watch over the children calmly.
- Get children back into a safe routine to make them feel secure.
- Try not to leave them alone. Spend as much relaxing time as possible together.
- Listen to them carefully. Make it clear that you don't deny any of their feelings but accept them.
- Provide children with opportunities for playing, doing sports and so on at their own pace.

Caution

Overdosing of alcohol or drugs for the purpose of distracting yourself from anxiety or the various stress reactions can harm your health or lead to dependence.



< About PTSD >

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental health condition caused by experiencing a life-threatening event such as a large-scale natural disaster, crime, traffic accident, sexual assault, DV and abuse, or witnessing a casualty scene. The strong sense of fear develops trauma. A person with PTSD relives the fear as severely as at the time of experience repeatedly even though such fear is supposed to lessen within several weeks.

Mental Care for Distressed People Psychological First Aid (PFA) Guide

How will you talk to people affected by a disaster, a crime, or an accident?



Published by:
Toyonaka City Mental Health Promotion Network



Toyonaka City provides consultation services on mental health.
If you have signs such as uneasiness, irritability, low appetite, and difficulty concentrating, don't try to cope with them by yourself but consult us.

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What is Psychological First Aid (PFA)?

PFA is a humane and supportive response to people who are suffering and may need support after being exposed to terrible events including natural disasters, accidents, fires, and violence. This leaflet is a guide to the most supportive things to say and do for the people who are distressed by terrible things without causing harm by your actions.

With the three action principles of “look, listen, and link”, PFA is a first aid anybody can give to people suffering mental injuries.



Preparation for PFA

In case of a major disaster or a serious accident, try to get as much accurate information as possible before entering the site.

- About the event: What happened? When and where did it take place? How many people are likely to be affected and who are they?
- Available services and supports at the site
- Safety and security concerns: Is the event over or continuing? What dangers may be in the environment?

Action principles of PFA – look, listen and link

Look

- Check for safety.
- Check for people with obvious urgent basic needs. (Food, clothing, and shelter)
- Check for people with serious distress reactions.



◎Distress reactions vary from person to person.
Children show different reactions depending on their developmental stages. (See the reverse side)

Listen

- Reach out to people who may need support.
 - Ask about their needs and concerns.
 - Listen to and help people to feel calm.
- ◎Listen with your eyes, ears, and heart.
- ✓Give the person your undivided attention.
 - ✓Sincerely listen to their concerns
 - ✓Show your care and respect



Link

- Help people acquire basic needs and access services.
 - Help people cope with problems on their own.
 - Provide accurate information
 - Connect people with loved ones and social support
- ◎If you have any concerns, connect the person with a specialist (physician, health nurse, nurse, psychiatric social worker, etc.). Explain the source of the information you are providing and how reliable it is. Only say what you know. Never make up information or give false reassurances.



Who is PFA for?

PFA is for distressed people, both children and adults, who have been exposed to a crisis. However, not everyone who experiences a crisis will need or want PFA. Do not force help on people who do not want it.

People who need more advanced support than PFA

- People with life-threatening injuries that need emergency medical care
- People who are too upset to care for themselves or their children
- People who may hurt themselves or commit suicide
- People who may hurt others



*Toyonaka City works on mental health activities based on the international standard for humane support for distressed people and people who need support (sphere standard), as well as promotes the diffusion of PFA based on the Toyonaka City Mental Health Plan.



<Do's>

- Be honest and trustworthy.
- Respect people's right to make their own decisions.
- Be aware of and set aside your own biases and prejudices.
- Make it clear to people that even if they refuse help now, they can access help in the future.
- Respect privacy and keep the person's story confidential if this is appropriate.
- Behave appropriately by considering the person's culture, age, and gender.



<Don'ts>

- Don't make false promises or give false information.
- Don't force help on people, and don't be intrusive or pushy.
- Don't exaggerate your skills.
- Don't press people to tell their stories.
- Don't share a person's story with others.
- Don't judge a person by his/her actions or feelings.