

PEER PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID

Check Cards



Anchor

Before you provide support

- ☐ Understand trauma
- ☐ Prepare yourself



Notice

Paying attention

- ☐ Recognize distress
- ☐ Who to look out for



Support

Offer your support

- ☐ Be a safe person
- ☐ Active listening
- ☐ Grounding



Connect

Help take the next step

- ☐ When to get more help
- ☐ Trusted resource list
- ☐ Disengage with care



Decompress

Take time to process

- ☐ Resilience journal
- ☐ Talk to someone you trust

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Anchor - Understand Trauma

What is trauma?

The reaction to a distressing event that is hard to cope with (too soon, too fast, too much) where we feel unsafe, humiliated rejected, abandoned, unsupported, powerless, etc.

What experiences are traumatic?

There is no rule about what experience can be traumatic as it is about how an individual experiences the event.

Something may be traumatic for one person, but someone else may experience that same event differently.

Ways trauma can happen:

One-off or ongoing events
Being directly harmed or neglected
Witnessing harm to someone else
Living in a traumatic atmosphere
Being affected by trauma in a family or community, including trauma that happened before you were born

Experiences young people may face

Anxiety about the future
Family conflicts / pressure
Domestic abuse
Sexual / relationship violence
Identity struggles
Discrimination

Anchor - Trauma Reactions

How our bodies respond to danger

When we feel stressed or threatened, our bodies release hormones called cortisol and adrenaline.

This can cause us to:

Freeze – feeling paralysed or unable to move

Flop – doing what you're told without being able to protest

Fight – fighting, struggling or protesting

Flight – hiding or moving away

Fawn – trying to please someone who harms you

If we experience trauma, our body's reactions can continue long after the trauma is over.

This Reaction Can Be:

Emotional

Anger, Shame, Grief, Worry, Irritation,
Confusion, Restlessness, Numbness,
Fear, Panic, Shock, Horror,
Hyper-vigilance, Difficulty feeling
emotions, Unsure of what you need or
want

Physical

Panic Attacks, Nightmares, Headaches,
Aches and pains, Shaking, Tiredness,
Sweating, Long-term health problems
linked to stress (missed or late periods),
sleep problems, Flashbacks, Memory
problems, Disassociation

Relational

Difficulty trusting people, isolation, losing
friendships

Behavioral

Self-harm, Changes to how often & what
you eat, Alcohol / Substance misuse,
Self-neglect,
Avoid certain places

Psychological

Negative thoughts,
Suicidal feelings,
Identity loss,

Anchor - What You Can Do

How else might trauma show up?

The effects of trauma can last for a long time, or they can come and go. People who have suffered from trauma may have difficulty with day-to-day aspects of life such as;

Looking after themselves

Holding down a job / focusing in school

Trusting others

Maintaining friendships or relationships

Remembering things

Making decisions

Their sex life

Coping with change

Understanding traumatic experiences alongside religious beliefs

Simply enjoying their leisure time

What you can do to help

Someone close to you may have already experienced, or may experience trauma in the future and might need your support.

Using the principles of psychological first aid, these cards will equip you with the tools you need to provide empathetic care and help those you love feel empowered to take the next steps towards getting the care they need.

RESILIENCE JOURNAL

**Understand where
you're starting from**

**Build your
B.A.S.E**

**Increase the holes in
your stress bucket**

**Build your
support system**

**Practice grounding
techniques**

Anchor - Visualisation

1

Find a focus point and breath
(2 mins)



Stand or sit in a stable position.
Find a visual focus point.
Use tactical breathing:

Inhale 4 seconds
Hold 4 seconds,
Exhale 4 seconds
Hold 4 seconds,
Repeat for 4 cycles

2

Visualise a controlled self
(1 min)



With each inhale & exhale,
visualise yourself in the
upcoming situation.

See yourself calm and
composed in control.

Picture yourself successfully
completing actions and
remaining focused.

3

Mental walk through
(2 mins)



Run through the most likely
situation you'll face.

Visualise the Process.

Imagine staying responsive to
any changes or challenges.

4

Visualise emotional control
(1 min)



Visualise any intense
emotions that may arise and
see yourself effectively
managing them.

Imagine staying grounded,
calm, and clear-headed.

5

End with a positive mental rehearsal
(1 min)



Finish by visualising a successful resolution to
the situation.

Focus on a positive affirmation, like "I am
prepared and capable," to reinforce self-
confidence.

Notice - How to Recognize Signs of Distress

This is not about diagnosing your friends, or judging someone's natural way of being, but staying attuned to people's physical and emotional states so that you notice shifts in behavior that may indicate something is going on that you can help through

PFA

Look out for these signs

Overreacting to situations.

Neglecting hygiene or basic care.

Communicating less than normal.

Sleeping more and still feeling tired.

Being less productive at work or school.

Increasing their use of drugs and alcohol.

Isolating themselves from friends and family.

Having trouble coping with everyday stressors.

Showing impaired judgment or reduced inhibitions.

Being sad, irritated, angry, or aggressive more easily.

No longer participating in activities they once enjoyed.

Saying things like:

What's the point?"
"I've let people down"

"I'm totally
worthless"

"I'm messing up
everything in my life."

Notice - Who to Look Out For



Culturally specific idioms for distress

Related to thoughts:

Kufungisisa meaning 'thinking too much' in Shona in Zimbabwe

Yeyeesi meaning 'many thoughts' in Kakwa in South Sudan

Related to the heart:

Poil-heart meaning 'heavy hearted' in Krio in Sierra Leone

Qalbi-jab meaning 'broken heart' in Somalia

Qalb maaboud meaning 'squeezed heart' in Arabic
(referring to dysphoria & sadness)

Houbout el qalb meaning 'falling or crumbling of the heart' in Arabic
(referring to the somatic reaction of sudden fear)

Related to the head

Amutwe alluhire meaning 'my head is tired' in Nande in the DRC

Related to the general body,

Jiu sukera gayo meaning 'drying of the body' used by Bhutanese refugee in Nepal
to indicate a situation of loss and desperation

Lashe mn grana meaning 'my body is heavy' in the Kirmanji Kurdish dialect

Support: Effective Communication

Body Language

Be Aware of Your Body Language:
Keep an open and confident posture



Stay Calm and Composed:
Maintain a steady demeanour

Make Eye Contact:
Establish eye contact to and build trust.
(If culturally appropriate to do so)

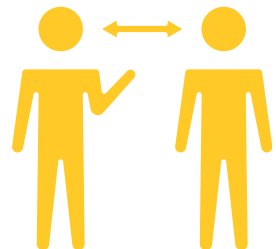


Be Aware of Non-Verbal Cues:
Pay attention to body language and facial expressions to help convey your message & understand the response.



Adapt to Language or Comprehension Barriers:
If the person doesn't speak the same language
use gestures or visuals.

Position Yourself Appropriately:
Stand at a safe distance but close enough to be
seen and heard clearly.



Stay Positive and Reassuring:
Offer positive reinforcement and reassurance

Support: Effective Communication

Verbal Communication

Verbal communication tips

Speak clearly and slowly

Use their name

Safe questions to open up dialogue

Do you want to talk about what's been going on?

How can I support you right now?

Would it help to just sit here together for a while?

Validating phrases

That sounds really hard

You don't have to go through this alone

I am here for you

I believe you

Thank you for telling me

What not to say

Don't try to fix the problem

Avoid giving advice

Don't compare

Don't dismiss their feelings

Support: Active Listening

Effective listening is about connecting with your eyes by offering undivided attention, your ears by genuinely listening, and your heart by showing empathy & respect throughout the conversation.

Here are key tips to enhance your active listening skills:

Be Fully Present: Eliminate distractions and give the person your full attention.	Use Open Body Language: Maintain eye contact, nod to show engagement & keep open, responsive body language.	Listen Without Interrupting: Allow the person to speak freely at their own pace. Avoid interruptions, rushing, or offering immediate solutions.
Reflect and Clarify: Paraphrase their words to confirm understanding, and ask for clarification if needed.	Validate Their Feelings: Acknowledge the person's emotions without judgment.	Stay Calm and Supportive Use a calm, reassuring tone to provide comfort and empathy.
Avoid Giving Advice or Solutions: Prioritise understanding over problem-solving or opinions	Ask Open-Ended Questions: Ask questions that invite people to expand on their thoughts and emotions.	Be Patient with Silence: Allow for pauses and silences. Give people the space to reflect.
Reflect Back Hope & Strengths: Reflect on people's resilience and strengths; boosting their sense of empowerment.	Be Honest and Transparent If you don't know the answer, be open about it. Only provide information you know to be accurate.	Avoid False Promises or Reassurances Do not make promises you can't keep or offer unrealistic reassurances.

Support: Grounding

If someone is overwhelmed and not responding to effective communication reality checks can help them reconnect with their surroundings and regain a sense of control.

Simple Grounding Techniques

Encourage the person to feel their feet on the ground, tap their hands on their lap, or gently place their hands on their body to reconnect with their physical sensations.

Sensory Awareness

Guide the person to notice their surroundings by asking them to identify things they can see, hear, feel, or smell. A prompt like, "Can you name five things you can see right now?" can help shift their focus to the present moment.

Breathing Exercises

Demonstrate slow, deep breaths for them to follow. Inhaling deeply through the nose and exhaling slowly helps people regulate their breathing and calm their nervous system.

Using a Grounding Object

Offer a grounding object, like a pebble, textured blanket, or bottle of water, and ask them to focus on what it feels like to touch or hold.

Gentle Movement

Encourage the person to perform simple physical movements, such as stretching, shaking out their hands, or standing up, to help reconnect with their body and reduce feelings of disorientation.

Connect: When to Get More Help

Signs to look out for

You cannot fix everyone's problems, however you can help guide them towards taking the next step.

Look out for these signs that professional support is needed.

If they talk about hurting themselves or others.

If they've experienced abuse or violence.

If they feel hopeless, empty or numb.



Connect: Trusted Resource List

Guiding them to further support

Crisis Lines	National Suicide & Crisis Lifeline = Call 988 National Crisis Lifeline = Text MN to 741741. Suicide Prevention = 612-873-2222 Crisis Intervention (Hennepin Co.) = 612-873-3161 Crisis Intervention (Ramsey Co.) = 651-266-7900 Men's Crisis Help line (St. Paul area) = 651-379-6367 National Runaway Hotline = 800-621-4000 Ramsey County Mental health Crisis = 651-266-7900
Mental health resources	Walk in Counselling Center = 612-870-0565 WAARM (support after a mental health related ER visit) = https://washburn.org/warm/ Ramsey County Mental Health Center = 651-266-7890 / 1919 University Ave. W., Suite 200, Saint Paul Mental Health Resources = 651-659-2900
Sexual / Domestic violence Resources	Asian Women United of Minnesota = 612-742-8823 Minnesota's hotline for domestic violence, sexual violence & human trafficking resources = Call: 866-223-1111 or Text: 612-399-9995 <i>Minneapolis - Hennepin County:</i> Child Abuse / neglect report = 612-348-3552 Cornerstone Advocacy Service = 952-884-0330 Adult Protection = 612-348-8526 Rape/Sexual Assault Center = 612-825-4357 Sexual Assault Resource Services = 612-873-5832 Sexual Violence Center = 612-871-5111 <i>St Paul - Ramsey County:</i> SOS (Sexual Offence Service) (24hr Crisis) = 651-643-3006 St. Paul Domestic Abuse Intervention = 651-645-2824 Children's Crisis Response (24/7) = 651-774-7000 Domestic Violence Emergency Hotline = 800-799-7233 Emergency Social Services after 9pm = 651-291-6795
LGBTQ+ Services	Trans Lifeline's Hotline (peer support) = 877-565-8860 OutFront Minnesota (MN's largest 2SLGBTQIA+ advocacy organization) = 800-800-0530 Pride Institute (LGBTQ+ Addiction Treatment) = 952-934-7554
Homelessness Resources	Hennepin Shelter Hotline = 612-204-8200 People Serving People (Shelter) 612-340-5400 Youth Link (homeless youth 16-19) = 612-252-1200 The Bridge for Youth (emergency homeless shelter for youth) = 612-377-8800
Legal Assistance	Legal Assistance Ramsey County = 651-222-5863

Connect: Saying Goodbye

Disengage Thoughtfully

**Ensure they know
you are here for them**

"We can figure this out together"

**Reassure them that
it is okay to take time
to heal**

"It's okay to take your time. You're doing more than enough already."

**Encourage them to take
the next steps**

"When you're ready, there are people who are able to support you."

**Acknowledge Their
Strength**

"I'm really proud of you for having the courage to share that with me."

**Respect Emotional
State**

"Do you have any other questions or anything else you want to talk through?"

**Thank them for
trusting you**

"Thank you for trusting me with this."

Disengage Thoughtfully

We'll leave it here for now. You did amazing."
I'll check in on you tomorrow, is that okay?"

DECOMPRESS

Resilience Journal

DECOMPRESSION TECHNIQUES

Collect your thoughts and emotions in a calm setting, allowing space to mentally and physically decompress.

Practice deep breathing: Use slow, deep breaths to regulate your nervous system. Focus on inhaling deeply through your nose, holding briefly, and exhaling slowly.

Engage in stretching to relieve muscle tension and promote relaxation.

Use physical movement to ground yourself: Simple activities like walking or moving freely can help discharge built-up stress & re-centre your focus.

Use grounding techniques: Reconnect with the present by focusing on your senses, such as feeling your feet on the ground, noticing your surroundings, or using an object as a sensory anchor.

Engage in self-soothing activities like meditation, listening to calming music, or a warm shower to unwind, release emotional tension, and promote self-compassion.

Reach out to your support system: Share your experiences and feelings with a trusted friend, family member, or adult who can provide a supportive ear and allow you to process emotions in a safe space,

Acknowledge Your Efforts: Recognize the efforts you put in, reminding yourself that you did your best with positive talk and affirmations like "I helped with the best I could under the circumstances."

Rest and Sleep Well: Quality sleep is crucial for emotional processing, hormone regulation, and cognitive recovery.

Engage in creative or mindful outlets: Engage in relaxing activities like drawing, journaling or gardening.

Spend time in nature or take gentle walks: to help reset your mind, reduce stress, and foster a sense of calm and connection.

Stay Aware of Your Reactions: Monitor your emotional and physical responses in the days following supporting someone, noting any persistent anxiety, distress, or discomfort that may require additional support.

Use Peer Support or Counselling Resources: If available, speak to peer support officers, counselors, or mental health professionals

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