



How can volunteers support **Ukraine** arrivals?

A guide to psychological first aid (PFA)



What is psychological first aid?

Psychological first aid (PFA) describes a humane, supportive response to a fellow human being who is suffering and who may need support.



Providing PFA responsibly means:

- 1 Respect **safety, dignity** and **rights**.
- 2 Adapt what you do to take account of the **person's culture**.
- 3 Be aware of other **emergency response** measures.
- 4 Look after **yourself**.

PFA action principles



PREPARE

Learn about the crisis event.
Learn about available services and supports.
Learn about safety and security concerns.



LOOK

Check for safety.
Check for people with obvious urgent basic needs.
Check for people with serious distress reactions.



LISTEN

Approach people who may need support.
Ask about people's needs and concerns.
Listen to people, and help them to feel calm.



LINK

Help people address basic needs and access services.
Help people cope with problems.
Give information.
Connect people with loved ones and social support.

Ethics

Ethical do's and don'ts are offered as guidance to avoid causing further harm to the person, to provide the best care possible and to act only in their best interest.

Offer help in ways that are most appropriate and comfortable to the people you are supporting. Consider what this ethical guidance means in terms of your cultural context.

✓ DO'S

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

✗ DON'TS

- DO NOT** exaggerate your skills.
- DO NOT** exploit your relationship as a helper.
- DO NOT** ask the person for any money or favours for helping them.
- DO NOT** force help on people, and don't be intrusive or pushy.
- DO NOT** pressure people to tell you their story or share the person's story with others.
- DO NOT** make false promises or give false information.
- DO NOT** judge the person for their actions or feelings.

How to administer PFA

Body Language

- 1 Approach the person **carefully** and **calmly**, make and **keep eye contact**
- 2 Introduce **yourself**, your **role** and whether you are affiliated with an **organization**
- 3 **Face the person** and kneel to the same level as the person you are speaking to
- 4 Be an **active listener** and rephrase what the other person is saying to you to **improve your understanding** of the situation
- 5 Keep your tone **calm** and **soft**, offer your hand or a hug, **if appropriate**
- 6 Remind the person that they are **safe** and that you are **here to listen**
- 7 **Normalize** feelings of distress in abnormal circumstances

Things to say

"I understand you are distressed..."

"I am so sorry to hear this..."

"I am so sorry you had to go through this..."

"You are safe now and I am here to listen"

"It is very normal to feel this way after what has happened"

"You are so strong and brave to express what you are going through"

"I am very grateful that you share this with me"



People who need more than PFA alone

Some people will need much more than PFA alone. Know your limits and ask for help from others who can provide medical or other assistance to save life.

People who need more advanced support immediately



People with serious, **life-threatening injuries** who need emergency medical care.



People who may **hurt themselves**.



People who may **hurt others**.



People who are so upset that they **cannot care for themselves** or their children.



People who show **physical symptoms** of distress (e.g. fainting)

Further information

For more advice on psychological first aid, consult the full-length [guidebook](#) or scan the QR code:

