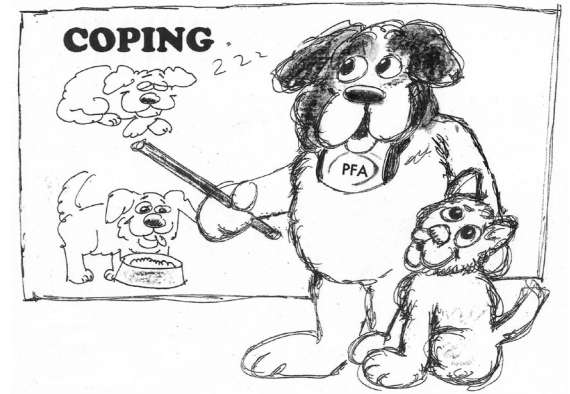


Appendix A:

Recommendations for School Staff



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Providing Psychological First Aid: Principals and Administrators

During and following an emergency, you will be responsible for the health and safety of your students and staff. They will look to you for guidance on how best to proceed. You may need to coordinate assistance from city, state, county, and/or federal agencies. You may be overwhelmed by the need to make myriad immediate decisions, predict unknown variables, and be accountable to the district and the community at large. Below are suggestions for how to implement PFA-S.

PFA-S Core Action 1: Contact and Engagement

Provide Leadership: To be most effective, be visible to the school community, delegate extensively, and provide steady, reassuring, and accessible leadership. Call on your school's district and community partners for their help and resources. Avoid closing off the school to agencies that can help in recovery. When you delegate specific and appropriate roles to your staff, they will feel more empowered and better able to stabilize students, parents, and others.

Reach out to Those Affected: Make contact with groups most affected by the incident, including family members of deceased students/staff, injured and hospitalized individuals, and staff members who have been directly affected. If you are unable to make contact, assign an administrative designee. In addition, assign a staff member to act as the Liaison Officer with community services (e.g., police, fire, mental health) and other response organizations.

Consider Consultation: If your safety plan does not apply to the incident at hand, contact the school district's emergency office, other local and state resources, or other administrators familiar with similar events to help you with the series of decisions you will have to make. You might also contact disaster mental health experts who have developed school-based recovery programs. Your state education agency, the US Department of Education, or local professional organizations can help identify such experts.

PFA-S Core Action 2: Safety and Comfort

Provide Regular Updates: Communicate regularly about the situation and services offered at the school or in the community. Set up mechanisms, such as staff meetings, to get updates from teachers and other staff members about ongoing safety concerns.

Address Identified Safety Concerns: Use a multidisciplinary team (including police, legal advisor, and school counselor) to assess and address the safety concerns of students, staff, and/or families. Consider developing a Threat Assessment Team, if your school does not already have one, so that students, staff, and parents have a reporting system through which they can anonymously share critical, sensitive information or report rumors.

Limit Media Access: Work with the district or your Public Information Officer on which messages will be released about the event, when, and how. Maintain a good working relationship with local media and provide regular updates in a pre-designated location during and after the emergency. Enforce policies to limit the amount of media exposure on school grounds. Monitor media stories to see how they may influence the safety concerns of the school community.

Help Manage Grief: Give special attention to those affected directly by the incident. Form a group of representative administrators, teachers, student leaders, community leaders, and parents to decide about memorial events, displays, or other ways to honor those who died, when temporary displays should be removed, and what information to include in the yearbook or how to honor the deceased at graduations.

PFA-S Core Action 3: Stabilization

Stabilize the School Environment: You can be a calming influence in the days and weeks after an incident. Stay visible. Try to greet students and staff as they enter school, visit classrooms, attend student gatherings or activities and/or community meetings.

Identify Possible Reminders: Meet with staff as soon as possible to discuss possible reminders of the incident within the school setting. Sounds, sights, or specific areas of the school may cause significant distress to others. Take steps, to the extent possible, to eliminate potential reminders. Remember: what serves as a memorial for some may serve as a trauma/loss reminder for others.

Identify Students at Risk: Make sure there are mechanisms in place to monitor those who need additional mental health support and other services. Encourage trainings be offered to all staff highlighting the common courses of recovery, signs of risk, and how to promote recovery.

PFA-S Core Action 4: Information Gathering

Become Fully Informed about the Incident: Take the time to understand fully what happened. When “mapping” the event, identify which groups may have been more affected than others. Obtain information from interviews, attendance records, nursing and/or teacher reports, police reports, and crisis team debriefing meetings. In a multi-agency response to an emergency, make sure a member of your administration is part of the Incident Command System.

Actively Reach out to Students: Work actively with your staff to identify how students are coping. Establish clear lines of communication and referral between staff and school counselors. You may want to encourage your health-related staff to conduct brief screenings to proactively identify students who are in need of additional support.

PFA-S Core Action 5: Practical Assistance

Coordinate Donations and Volunteers: Other schools and community agencies may offer their assistance, and donations may arrive from various sources. Assign a staff member to monitor and coordinate these efforts; otherwise, you may be overwhelmed trying to manage such donations.

PFA-S Core Action 6: Connection with Social Supports

Integrate New Students: Students who have been through an emergency may transfer to your school temporarily or permanently. Encourage staff to integrate these students into the school culture and orient them to the school procedures as quickly as possible. Avoid singling out these students in a way that alienates them from the rest of the student body.

Establish Peer-to-Peer Programs: Help students reach out to each other. Peer-to-peer programs facilitate a sense of belonging among students and help connect incoming students to peers.

Maintain School Community Connections: If your school is unable to reopen immediately, establish ways students can get in contact with each other (e.g., website, social media, an event).

PFA-S Core Action 7: Information on Coping

Provide Psychoeducation and Information: Hold staff and parent meetings as soon as possible. Clarify what happened, describe available resources, and explain next steps. Be prepared for intense conversations and questions that you do not have answers to yet. Have a team, that includes police (when relevant) and mental health professionals, with you to address these questions.

Promote Your School as an Environment for Recovery: Stress that there are different courses of recovery and that you are doing your best to put in place policies and procedures that will support recovery and promote learning and academic functioning. Let individuals know if the school will continue to provide services for those having difficulties in the future or will provide additional support (staff, respite, resources) for staff dealing with their own recovery.

Maintain School/Academic Routines: Students do better when they can return to their regular routine. Reopen school as quickly as possible, help reestablish school routines, and make modifications as needed. For example, advise teachers if they should consider adjusting their teaching plan and to be prepared to postpone some events if safety concerns remain.

PFA-S Core Action 8: Link with Collaborative Services

Activate Mutual Aid Agreements: Contact agencies with whom your school has preexisting mutual aid agreements and identify others needed to assist in your school's recovery.

Seek and Apply for Funding: Financial resources may be available to provide services to those affected by the crisis (e.g., Victims of Crime, American Red Cross) or to your school (e.g., Dept. of Ed Project SERV grants; SAMHSA SERG grants). Research the agency's sites regarding eligibility requirements and assign staff to work on the applications.

In the days and weeks following an emergency, the school becomes a recovery milieu. Due to your leadership role, you will be under extraordinary stress at this time. Secondary traumatic stress is common for those in these positions. As you create an environment to promote recovery in those around you, be sure to practice self-care. In doing so, you will model self-care for your staff and students, and you will be able to meet your responsibilities most effectively.

Providing Psychological First Aid: Teachers

During an emergency, your primary responsibility is the safety and welfare of you and your students. When classes resume, you may feel the need to return to academics quickly. However, to best promote long-term recovery and to help students return to their pre-crisis ability to concentrate and function academically, be sure to talk to them about the recovery process and address any safety concerns. You may want to modify the classroom curriculum temporarily, take extra time to cover certain material, or postpone possibly distressing subject matter. Below are suggestions on how to implement PFA-S.

PFA-S Core Action 1: Contact and Engagement

Take the Initiative: Students may withdraw or have other difficulties recovering from the crisis and fail to seek help. Actively reach out to students, especially those you have a good relationship with. If they aren't willing to talk with you, seek out another staff member who may be able to help. Speak in private if you can and be discreet.

Seek Consultation: It is impossible to prepare for every scenario that may occur or every concern students may have. Consult the school's mental health professional or have him/her visit your class to give information and answer students' questions.

PFA-S Core Action 2: Safety and Comfort

Reassure Students: In the days and weeks after the incident, students may continue to show signs of emotional distress or concern. Reassure them that they can come to you with such concerns and/or inform them of the procedures in place to get help.

Report Safety Concerns: Be alert to safety concerns about subsequent incidents or rumors, and report any such rumors or threats immediately to the school's Safety Officer or administration.

Help Manage Grief: If a student is struggling with the death of a friend or loved one, provide appropriate emotional support. After identifying the needs of the student, notify the school's mental health professional of the situation and modify academic assignments as needed.

Provide Information about the Event: Consider these guidelines when talking with students:

- ✓ Be truthful and share information in a developmentally appropriate way.
- ✓ Discourage discussion about details of any death or disturbing aspects of the event.
- ✓ Provide a timeline of upcoming school activities (clearing of debris, removal of memorial displays, rebuilding efforts).
- ✓ Work with the students in planning memorial tributes or displays. Inform them about any applicable school procedures or restrictions.
- ✓ Encourage students to participate in prosocial service activities (volunteer days, fund raising events). Help students assemble cards, letters, and memory books for the families of the victims, but ensure that the content of such materials is appropriate.

PFA-S Core Action 3: Stabilization

Stabilize the School Environment: Calmly convey to your students that the staff and administration are continuing to monitor the situation and will attempt to address any concerns they might have. Students are often anxious when facing trauma-related chaos, changes, and transitions. Providing them with a calm, supportive environment with clear rules and expectations will help them regain a sense of security and normalcy.

Identify Possible Reminders: Take steps, to the extent possible, to eliminate potential reminders in your classroom that may cause distress (e.g., substitute potentially distressing lesson plans, remove hanging pictures of the crisis on the walls). If a student does become reactive, calmly provide emotional support or refer him/her to the school's health/mental health professional.

PFA-S Core Action 4: Information Gathering

Know Common Signs of Distress: Watch and listen for any students who show signs of distress or changes in behavior and refer them to the appropriate professionals. Signs of distress vary by age and developmental level and can include:

- Poor control of emotions
- Anger and moodiness
- Frustration and anxiety
- Social withdrawal
- Change in academic performance or in attendance
- Trouble with concentration, memory, cognition, and organization
- Physical symptoms like headaches and stomachs
- Risk-taking, unpredictable, and/or impulsive behavior
- Intense reactions to reminders of the event

Identify Students Needing Services: If you see changes in a student, ask directly how he/she is doing. Many students will not tell someone they are having difficulty until they are directly asked. Also ask the student if he/she knows of any classmates who may need help. They are often aware of changes in their peers.

PFA-S Core Action 5: Practical Assistance

Identify Students with Resource Needs: Help to identify students' needs, such as school supplies, tutoring, or uniforms. If a student has transferred from another school system, find out if they have an IEP, whether there are accommodations to meet personalized plans, or other academic needs.

Help Families: You may be able to help students' families with their needs and concerns by directing them to appropriate support staff and resources. Reassure them of the steps the school is taking to promote recovery. Use a part of staff meetings to discuss some of these needs and concerns so that administration can problem-solve ways how to address them (e.g., identify additional community resources, use of donation funds).

PFA-S Core Action 6: Connection with Social Supports

Integrate New Students: Students from other schools may transfer to your school temporarily or permanently. Attempt to integrate new students into your class as soon as possible. Introduce them to other students with similar interests (sports, arts, clubs) or from similar neighborhoods. Avoid singling out these students in a way that could alienate them from the rest of the student body. Be aware that they will be missing their old friends and strategize ways to reconnect them if possible.

Increase In-Class Interaction: You will want to encourage interaction among students to facilitate social support. Increase the number of group activities and collaborative assignments. Encourage reconnection with family, friends, and members of their faith communities. Provide information about upcoming community events and give details about these events with added precautions. Thus, give details about events and add precautions if you are concerned that some students may not be ready for some events (e.g., memorials).

PFA-S Core Action 7: Information on Coping

Address Concerns: Schedule time with students to listen to their concerns about the incident. Correct misconceptions they may have about recovery. Schedule this discussion early in the day and when there is enough time to address all concerns.

Maintain Structure: Help students' recovery by keeping to the regular classroom structure as best you can. Students benefit from predictability and consistency. When children need to change teachers and/or classrooms, make the new setting as similar as possible to the previous one. If this is not possible, discuss the losses and changes as a group.

Provide Support: Students may exhibit more defiant, hyperactive, and/or distractive behaviors in your classroom. Remain calm and provide clear instructions of the behavior you expect. Praise students for appropriate, on-task behavior and for using effective coping skills. To assist students to be more organized, breakdown assignments into manageable parts and encourage them to write them in their planners.

PFA-S Core Action 8: Link with Collaborative Services

Provide Information on Available Services: All families, students, and staff need to know the location of school and community services and the steps required to access these services. If you are unsure of the appropriate and available resources, refer the individual in need to support staff who have that information. Have psychoeducational and informational materials available for parents in order to address their questions.

Follow up on Recommendations: Check in with students and parents to make sure that they are getting the services or resources you have recommended. If not, review the plan and adjust it accordingly.

In the days and weeks following an emergency, the school often becomes a recovery milieu. You play a vital role in the recovery of the students and the school community. You serve as the primary contact person for students throughout the course of the day by watching out for the welfare of students, identifying those who are struggling and getting them help, and providing updated and accurate information which you obtain through staff meetings and from the school administration. By utilizing the suggestions in this handout, you can help students recover and succeed academically, psychologically, and socially. These strategies can also help you and your family. Most importantly, don't forget to take care of yourself during these stressful times.

Providing Psychological First Aid: Health-Related Professionals

You play a unique role in caring for the needs of the school community during and after times of crisis. The acute phase is not the time to provide therapy. It is the time for immediate assistance to those affected by the emergency. If you are called to a situation that is beyond your usual scope of practice, do not hesitate to consult providers more experienced in this type of event. If you are from an outside agency responding to a school crisis, you may be more helpful by assisting staff and parents than providing direct care to those most impacted, freeing the school health and mental health staff to provide the direct support needed after such events.

PFA-S Core Action 1: Contact and Engagement

Be Aware of Cultural and Developmental Issues: Before working directly with students and staff, learn about the school culture and the cultural and developmental issues of the survivors to whom you will be providing services. Modify contact based on these factors.

Reach out to Those Affected: Outreach to students and staff, even though they may avoid asking for or seeking help. If you are new to the school, work with teachers or other staff who are more familiar with the school community. At a minimum, talk to school officials about the individuals who were most impacted in the emergency, and find out if there are prior events or situations that may put this group at increased risk for distress.

Work as a Team: Always work within the Incident Command System and within a team, so that you can utilize each member's unique skill sets. Communicate frequently with your team to learn about changing needs and concerns.

Plan for Students' Ongoing Needs: Students with the greatest exposure and those who have experienced a death or witnessed the death of a friend or loved one will need continuing support at school. Make sure a school staff member is assigned to support these individuals, rather than a PFA provider from the community who may not be able to assist the students' long-term needs.

PFA-S Core Action 2: Safety and Comfort

Ensure Safety: Ask staff and students if they have any current safety concerns at school. Listen for rumors or threats of subsequent incidents, and report any such rumors or threats immediately to the school's Safety Officer or administration.

Watch for High-Risk Behavior: Students may increase substance use or participate in other high-risk behaviors (e.g., driving recklessly, initiating fights), endangering themselves or others. Students are the first to know if a peer is troubled, so ask them directly if they are concerned about anyone's safety. Address these concerns immediately. Seek additional assistance if needed (e.g., school resource officer, threat assessment team).

Support Those Overwhelmed with Grief: Support and comfort those overwhelmed with the death of a friend or family member. You might work with teachers on how to talk to their class about the death of a student or staff member, help administration with memorial events and displays, and/or assess at-risk students.

PFA-S Core Action 3: Stabilization

Identify Vulnerable Students and Staff: Those with a history of prior mental health problems or who have had similar past traumas may have more difficulty in the current crisis. Be sure to ask about prior experiences and coping strategies. Check in with these individuals frequently, particularly if there are continuing safety concerns at the school. Be aware that they may have distressing reactions to reminders of former traumatic events or may become unstable, more so than the rest of the school population. Offer to guide them in relaxation and grounding techniques, and check back with them to assess how they are doing.

Differentiate between Physical and Emotional Distress: Some students and staff members may present with physical reactions and may have frequent visits to the nurse or a medical doctor. Ask about their experience during the crisis and how they are coping. Find out if the physical reactions are related to the recent trauma (e.g., Did the symptoms start around the time of the event? Do they become more severe when the person is reminded of the event?), and consider a referral to a mental health specialist.

PFA-S Core Action 4: Information Gathering

Know All You Can about the Incident: Find out what happened during the event and who was affected. When “mapping” the event, learn which individuals may have been more impacted than others. Obtain information from interviews, attendance records, nursing and/or teacher reports, police reports, and crisis team debriefing meetings.

Develop a Referral System: Educate staff members as to how they can refer students for evaluation or services. Provide staff psychoeducation on common risk factors and developmentally-specific signs that a student is at risk. Routinely ask teachers about how their students are behaving in the classroom and whether they have any concerns.

Proactively Screen/Assess Students and Staff: Use standardized measures to screen students and staff in terms of their experiences during the event in order to identify those in distress. Systematic screening is the most effective way to identify those who are at risk or who need additional services.

PFA-S Core Action 5: Practical Assistance

Don’t Underestimate the Importance of Practical Assistance: Assisting with practical needs is a protective factor that enhances recovery. You are in a key position to identify the needs of students and staff and to identify barriers to obtaining resources. Link staff and students to support staff or to an agency contact who can provide these services.

Coordinate Needs: Work with your team leader to ensure that requests for supplies (food, water, toys) are relayed up the chain of command. Also work with families to help with such things as transportation, recouping costs from recovery, and so forth. While some of these activities may be beyond your typical job responsibilities, coordinating practical needs is essential and may require you to expand your role.

PFA-S Core Action 6: Connection with Social Supports

Establish Social Connectedness Programs: Develop venues to increase interaction among students and staff. You might facilitate group discussions on various health- or mental health-related topics pertinent to the crisis, or you might help publicize upcoming, supportive community events. Encourage individuals to reconnect with their family members, friends, and members of their faith community or other social or community organization. For students, make recommendations specific to extramural student group activities or facilitate a peer-to-peer program that may provide a venue for social support.

Integrate New Students: Students may transfer to other schools temporarily or permanently. Attempt to integrate these students into the school culture and orient them to the school procedures as quickly as possible. Avoid singling out these students in ways that might alienate them from the rest of the student body. For example, too much attention from faculty and staff may result in peers distancing themselves from the new students. Do try to connect these students with former friends or classmates, as connectedness is an important protective factor.

PFA-S Core Action 7: Information on Coping

Meet with Parents: Attend the parents' meetings and provide information about common reactions, address safety concerns, and discuss available resources. Be prepared for these meetings to be stressful, as parents will be anxious and may have significant safety concerns. Parents, like students and staff, cope best when provided with support. School-sponsored meetings can provide parents with the opportunity to build their own social support network. Always conduct these meetings in partnership with the administration and law enforcement.

No One Way to Recover: You will often get questions about the natural course of recovery. Emphasize that there is no one "right" way to recover and that different people will recover at different points in time. Most importantly, emphasize that everyone should respect individual differences. To this end, teach students and staff about typical reactions after emergencies, trauma/loss reminders, reestablish schedules and routines, and effective coping strategies.

PFA-S Core Action 8: Link with Collaborative Services

Provide Information on Available Services: Inform families, students, and staff about the location of mental health and other services and the steps required to access them. You may have to broaden your list of community services to fully address the students' and staff members' current needs.

Update the Referral List to Include Trauma and Loss-Informed Services: Do the research to make sure that the providers on the referral list have experience in the type of event that occurred. If you have or are given a standard referral list, review it in light of the situation; and do your best to add the names of professionals who can offer more specialized, developmentally appropriate, and trauma/loss-informed services.

Facilitate Access to Services: To ensure that students and staff are connected with relevant services, help make the calls, double-check that the agency is accepting referrals, and address any concerns students or staff members might have about the services.

In the days and weeks following an emergency, the school becomes a recovery milieu. Health-related professionals play an important role in monitoring the course of recovery of the students and staff. By actively reaching out to the school community, creating a referral system, and providing state-of-the-art services and programs, health-related professionals can help the school stabilize and accelerate recovery. Secondary traumatic stress is common for those in the helping professions and in leadership roles. As you create an environment to promote recovery in those around you, be sure to practice your own self-care.

Providing Psychological First Aid: Support Staff

You are a valuable resource in times of crisis and an integral part of the school's recovery. Prior to any crisis, it is important that you know your school's emergency plan. Be familiar with the Incident Command Structure and procedures. Know where to ask questions or seek more information. School Resource Officers should coordinate plan with community responders to make sure that plans are familiar to all who may respond and are consistent. Below are ways that you can implement PFA-S.

PFA-S Core Action 1: Contact & Engagement

Remain Calm: In your various duties, you will be around students, parents, and other adults who may be in distress or expressing strong emotions. By remaining calm, this can help others calm.

Take the Initiative: Initiating contact and conversation can help to identify students or adults who may need assistance. Conversation starters can be as simple as "Do you need anything?" or "Are you ok?" Offering practical assistance (food, water) can help to initiate contact.

Monitor Changes in Others: Be watchful of changes in behavior in students or staff (e.g., not as talkative, changes in attire, less social, appears more angry). Report your concerns to the appropriate person at the school, such as a health-related professional or administration.

PFA-S Core Action 2: Safety & Comfort

Reassure Current Safety: Inform students that the adults are there to protect them and keep them safe. If the emergency is over, students, especially younger children, may need to be repeatedly told of their safety. Even when the emergency is still ongoing, children need to be assured that everything possible is being done to keep them safe.

Ensure Continued Safety: This may include assisting in the evacuation of a school or monitoring the interactions of others in a reunification area. When children are anxious, they often act out. If students are behaving in an unsafe manner, calmly convey the rules and what is expected of them. If the behavior continues, alert the school resource officer or administration.

Watch for High-Risk Student Behavior: After a crisis, students may increase substance use or participate in other high-risk behaviors (e.g., driving recklessly, initiating fights), endangering themselves or others. If you see this behavior or hear such concerns, report the matter to administration or school resource officer.

PFA-S Core Action 3: Stabilization

Support Those Overwhelmed: Some students and staff may show signs of distress. Remain calm and see if the person calms after a few minutes. See if you can assist with any current needs or reassure current safety. If the individual has difficulty calming, seek out a health-related professional to provide further assistance.

Stabilize the School Environment: Calmly convey to the students that the staff and administration are continuing to monitor the situation and will address any concerns they might have. Students are often anxious when facing trauma-related chaos, changes, and transitions. Providing them with a calm, supportive environment with clear rules and expectations will help them regain a sense of security and normalcy.

Identify Possible Reminders: Take steps, to the extent possible, to eliminate potential reminders in the school that may cause distress to others (e.g., not using the same signal to call the custodian that was used in the emergency).

PFA-S Core Action 4: Information Gathering

Identify Current Needs: Ask simple, respectful questions to determine how you may help. If the person needs assistance beyond what you can offer, connect them to a teacher, health-related professional, or whoever else is needed.

Know the Referral System: Make sure you are educated about how to refer students who need help. Learn about the warning signs and developmentally-specific signs that a student is at-risk.

PFA-S Core Action 5: Practical Assistance

Don't Underestimate the Importance of Practical Assistance: Assisting with practical needs is a protective factor that enhances recovery. You can play an important role in identifying the needs of students and staff and to identify barriers to obtaining resources. Link students and staff to those who are coordinating services at the school or an agency contact who can provide these services in the community.

Attend to Needs: Ensure that requests for supplies and delivery of items requested are coordinated and communicated throughout the staff. Work with other staff to help with such things as transportation, monitoring the reunification site, and so forth. While some of these activities may be beyond your typical job responsibilities, helping with practical needs is essential and may require you to expand your role.

PFA-S Core Action 6: Connection with Social Supports

Help to Connect with Supports: Help students to connect with family members, teachers, aides, coaches, or those they find as a comfort. Also help students to gather together and encourage them to support each other. You can make recommendations specific to extramural student group activities that may provide a venue for social support.

Keep Watch for Withdrawn Students: Observe students who may be isolating or limiting their social interactions with others. Check in with students and ask if they are okay. For new students, introduce yourself and welcome them.

PFA-S Core Action 7: Information on Coping

Provide a Recovery Milieu: After a crisis, all at the school should create an environment that enhances recovery. Encourage those that need help to seek support or other assistance during the school day as needed.

No One Way to Recover: You could often get questions from others about the natural course of recovery. Emphasize that there is not one way to recover and that different people will recover at different points in time. Most importantly, emphasize that everyone should respect individual differences.

PFA-S Core Action 8: Link with Collaborative Services

Provide Information on Available Services: In coordination with school policy, pass out handouts or know the official websites that will list available services at the school and in the community and the steps required to access them.

Facilitate Access to Services: To ensure that students and staff get connected to relevant services, help make the calls, double-check that the agency is accepting referrals, and address any concerns students or staff might have about the services.

In the days and weeks following an emergency, the school often becomes a recovery milieu. Everyone plays an important role in the recovery of the students and the school community. By utilizing the suggestions in this handout, you can help students recover and succeed academically, psychologically, and socially. These strategies can also help you and your family. Most importantly, don't forget to take care of yourself during these stressful times.