

Listen, Protect, Connect — Model & Teach

**PSYCHOLOGICAL
FIRST AID (PFA) FOR
STUDENTS AND TEACHERS**



**Helping you help your students
in times of disaster.**

As a teacher, you are in an excellent position to help your students after a disaster.



Just as you help connect students with appropriate academic and counseling services under normal circumstances, you are in an excellent position to help your students return to school, stay in school, continue to learn, and return to their usual school-based activities after a disaster.

For More Information

Please visit www.ready.gov.

Ready is a national public service advertising campaign produced by The Advertising Council in partnership with U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The *Ready* Campaign is designed to educate and empower Americans to prepare for and respond to emergencies, including natural disasters and potential terrorist attacks.

**For more information on
Listen, Protect, Connect —
Model and Teach**

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**“Listen, Protect, and Connect — Model & Teach”
Psychological First Aid for Children**

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It is okay for you to seek professional help for yourself:

- ✓ When you have feelings of being overwhelmed or overly stressed that don't go away over time.
- ✓ When you are not sure about how to handle a situation with a student or a family member.

Over time:

- * you,
- * your students,
- * their families,
- * your classroom

can **EXPECT RECOVERY.**



You can help your students if you

Listen, Protect, Connect — Model & Teach

the **steps of PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID** for your students after a disaster.

These steps can help them bounce back more quickly from a disaster.

Getting Started: Understanding the Effect of a Disaster on Your Students

THINK ABOUT your students’ **“DIRECT EXPERIENCE”** with the disaster.

“Direct experience” means a **FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE** of the disaster (physically experiencing or directly seeing the event as it happens).

After a disaster, changes can happen in students’ thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Your students may worry about family members, classmates, friends, or pets they care about, and may worry if the disaster will happen again.

Common reactions to disasters include trouble sleeping, problems at school and with friends, trouble listening, and not finishing work or assignments. Your students may become more irritable, sad, angry, or worried as they think about what has happened, and as they experience recovery efforts after the disaster.

Listen, Protect, Connect — Model & 5. Teach

Talk to your students about **expected reactions after a crisis** (emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and physiological). There are “normal” reactions to abnormal events.

- * Explain that children of different ages (e.g., their brothers and sisters) understand and react differently to disasters, and that people have different time periods they need to cope afterward.
- * **Encourage your students to identify and use positive coping strategies to help them after the event.**
- * Help your students problem solve in getting through each day successfully.
- * **Help your students set small “doable” goals and share in these achievements as “wins” for the students and your classroom.**
- * Remind your students that, with time, things will get easier for them and everyone who experienced the disaster.



Listen, Protect, Connect — 4. Model & Teach

As you help your students after a disaster, your **efforts may be more successful** — and you may be less stressed — if you **keep in mind**:

* It is good to be aware of your thoughts, feelings, and reactions about the event, which can be seen and can affect your students.



- * How you cope and behave after an event will influence how your students cope and behave. Your students will be watching you for both verbal and non-verbal cues.
- * Monitor conversations that students may hear.
- * Acknowledge the difficulty of the situation, but demonstrate how people can come together to cope after a disaster.

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When students share their thoughts and feelings about the disaster, LISTEN for RISK FACTORS that can increase their adverse reactions to it.

Risk factors that may indicate a counseling referral for students include:

- loss of a family member, schoolmate, or friend
- seeing serious injury or the death of another person
- family members or friends missing after the disaster
- getting hurt or becoming sick due to the disaster
- home loss, family moves, changes in neighborhoods, changes in schools, and/or loss of belongings
- being unable to evacuate quickly
- past traumatic experiences
- pet loss

If a student has had any of these experiences, you may wish to consider referring her or him to your school psychologist, counselor, or social worker.

Now that you know what can affect your students after a disaster, you're ready to
**LISTEN, PROTECT, CONNECT —
MODEL & TEACH!**

For more information, please visit www.ready.gov.

1. Listen, Protect, Connect — Model & Teach

The first important step to help your students after a disaster is to **listen and pay attention** to what they say and how they act. Remember that your students may also show their feelings in non-verbal ways, like increased behavioral problems or increased withdrawal.

Let your students know you are willing to listen and talk about the disaster, or to make referrals to talk to the appropriate professional if they prefer it. Use the following questions to talk with your students. **You can listen for clues that indicate when students are having a hard time. Jot down a few examples:**

1. What might be preventing a student from coming to or staying in school?

- * Encourage student activities with friends, including class projects and extracurricular activities.
- * Empathize with your students by allowing a little more time for them to learn new materials,
- * Build on your students’ strengths. Find ways to help them use what they have learned in the past to help them deal with the disaster.
- * Remind your students that a major disaster is rare, and discuss other times they have felt safe.

List programs and activities that connect you and your students with the community:

**Listen, Protect,
3. Connect —
Model & Teach**



Reaching out to people in your school and community will help your students after a disaster. These connections will build strength for everyone.

Consider ways to make some or all of the following connections:

- * “Check in” with students on a regular basis.
- * Find resources that can offer support to your students and classroom.
- * Keep communication open with others involved in your students’ lives (parents, other teachers, coaches, siblings, etc.).
- * Restore interactive school activities, including sports, club meetings, student-serviced projects, and student government.

2. What might be preventing a student from paying attention in class or doing homework?

3. What might be preventing a student from returning to other school-based activities?



Listen, observe, and note:

- * Changes in behavior and/or mood.
- * Changes in school performance.
- * Changes with schoolmates and teachers.
- * Changes at school-based activities.
- * Changes that parents discuss with you.

Listen, 2. Protect, Connect — Model & Teach

You can **help make your students feel better** by doing some or all of the following:



- * Answer questions simply and honestly, clearing up confusion students may have.
- * **Let your students know that they are not alone in their disaster experience.**
- * Provide opportunities for your students to talk, draw, and play, but **don't force it.**
- * **Talk to your students about what is being done by the school and community to keep everyone safe from harm.**
- * Watch for anything in the environment that could re-traumatize your students.
- * **Keep your eyes and ears open for bullying behaviors.**

- * Maintain daily routines, activities, and structure with clear expectations, consistent rules, and immediate feedback; limit unnecessary changes.
- * Limit access to live television and the Internet that show disturbing scenes of the disaster. **Remember, what's not upsetting to you and other adults may upset and confuse your students, and vice versa.**
- * Encourage students to “take a break” from the crisis focus with activities unrelated to the event.
- * **Find ways for your students to feel helpful to your classroom, the school, and the community.**

List other things you do that help your students feel better:
