

The Basics

Reach Out Physically

- Position yourself at the victim's side and at their level.
- Gentle touch – unless the victim pulls away.
- Use a soft voice.
- Use the victim's name.

Reach Out Emotionally

- Ask the victim how they are feeling
- Acknowledge the victim's experience
- Don't minimize the victim's experience (i.e. "You'll be OK")

Don't Overlook the Quiet Victims

Many victims after a tragic event are stunned and may appear unaffected. Remember that many people can be affected by a tragic event – witnesses, rescuers, children...

- Don't overlook these "invisible victims"
- When you suspect someone is affected by a tragic event, reach out with caring and curiosity – "How are you?"

Protect the victim from making impulsive decisions

Most major decisions can wait until the victim is thinking clearly.

- Protect the victim from being victimized by others who may not have the best interest of the victim in mind.
- Provide for the victim's physical needs – food, medicine, safe place

Reassure

Many victims have an urgent need for information after a tragic event – “What happened?”; “Why?” Assist the victim in getting the information he needs. The victim may need an *Information Advocate*.

- Victims often blame themselves for the crisis event. Help a guilty victim gain perspective by asking them to tell you the “whole story.”
- Try to gently point out to the victim what they did right before, during, or after the tragic event.

Organize

Victims are often paralyzed after a tragic event and often lose their capacity to deal with all of the new demands created by the tragedy. Assist the victim in developing a simple plan.

- Suggest – “Let’s focus on what needs to be done now.”

Reinforce

The actions which the victim is taking or wants to take to emotionally survive the tragic event. The victim will struggle to find something or someone to hold onto in the first few hours. You may need to “clear the way” so that the victim is able to do what they want to do.

Summary

In the first few hours after a tragic event, people who have “a job to do” or who have opinions about what the victim should or shouldn’t do often surround the victim. The primary goal of the person providing Emotional First Aid is to enable the victim to act according to their wishes, values, and beliefs and not according to what others think should be done.

- Do not *over care* or do too much for the victim. Remember that the primary psychological challenge for the victim is to be encouraged to make decisions and take action in his own behalf.
- Finally, a broken heart cannot “be fixed.” Do not try! A caring presence is what you can offer someone who is emotionally devastated. Just being there is very powerful and will be experienced by the victim as very helpful.

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