

Listen, Protect and Connect:

Family to Family, Neighbor to Neighbor



Psychological First Aid (PFA)
for The Community Helping Each Other

Helping Those Around You
in Times of Disaster

When a disaster strikes, those around us - our family, friends and neighbors - are often the first ones to offer help.

You may be close with your family and friends. With neighbors, you may just nod or wave from across the street. No matter how well you know the people living near you, the help we give and get from each other makes it easier to “bounce back” from a disaster and helps our entire community recover.



“Connect with your neighbors. Be prepared to respond.”

You help those around you in a disaster
or emergency when you:

Listen, Protect and Connect

These are the three steps of
“psychological first aid.” Psychological first
aid means supporting one another by
listening to their concerns and needs,
trying to help out where you can and
connecting them with other resources in
the community.

Just as people learn CPR or first aid
to help during medical emergencies,
knowing how to provide psychological first
aid is an important thing you can do for
your family, friends and neighbors’ well-
being after a disaster.

Support from each other
is one of the first things we need after
disasters. Everyone can learn
psychological first aid using the

“Listen, Protect and Connect”
ideas in this guide.

Getting Started:

Understanding the Effects of a Disaster

What determines how someone is affected by a disaster? One key risk factor is what happened to them during or after the disaster, or their “direct experience.”

“Direct experience” means physically experiencing or directly seeing where others are severely injured or killed, losing loved ones, being evacuated or having severe damage to where you live causing you to move, and feeling as if your life or the lives of your loved ones is in danger.

Thoughts and feelings: After a disaster, we may have changes in our thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

- Worry is expectable and common
 - We may worry about our family, friends and even our pets. We may worry about how the event will change our neighborhood and community and if it will happen again.
- At times, we may be angry because of what happened and feel that there isn't enough being done quickly to help.
- Upsetting thoughts and feelings over things we've done or not done are also common.

Common reactions to disasters:

- Trouble sleeping



- More easily upset, sad or angry
- Problems at work or school
- Thinking over and over about what happened in the disaster

- Irritation with others

- Trouble listening

- Not finishing work, school assignments or chores
- Difficulty concentrating and paying attention



Although worrisome reactions are common after disasters, they frequently get better over time. There are some things that make bouncing back more difficult. Some experiences, such as those on the list below, can make it harder to cope:

Use this risk factor list to decide if your friend or neighbor might need further support:

- ☐ Death of a family member or friend
- ☐ Feeling as your life or the lives of loved ones was in danger
- ☐ Seeing serious injury or the death of another person
- ☐ Missing family members
- ☐ Getting hurt or becoming sick due to the disaster
- ☐ Worrying about becoming sick
- ☐ Being unable to evacuate quickly or becoming trapped
- ☐ Losing your home
- ☐ Having to move or family members having to move,
- ☐ Changing schools or neighborhoods
- ☐ Losing your job and/or losing important belongings
- ☐ Having past traumatic experiences
- ☐ Losing a pet
- ☐ Dealing with money problems
- ☐ Extended recovery efforts

(source: PsySTART Triage System)

If your family, friends or neighbors have had one or more of these happen to them...

- You can follow the steps in this booklet to support them. After you have provided psychological first aid, you may also consider suggesting that they talk to a health care provider, faith leader or other professionals such as a mental health professional – particularly if:
 - It's making their day-to-day life harder.
 - They continue to have the reactions described on page 5.
 - You think that they would benefit from further support.



Commonly, support from family, friends and neighbors is enough to help us move forward. Now that you know some of the common reactions that can affect anyone in the community after a disaster, you can help them with

**LISTEN, PROTECT
and CONNECT**

1 Listen, Protect and Connect

“Listen” is the first step of Psychological first aid, which is helping our family, friends, and neighbors in our community after a disaster. **“Listen”** means several things. Before helping someone, being willing to listen is important to understand what they are concerned about and what they may need most right now.

The **“Listen”** step includes:

Hearing what someone is saying (the words) and how they say it (the tone and how they look when speaking).

Attending to what is not said. Non-verbal behaviors can give you a lot of information about how your family, friends, and neighbors may be doing.

Watching how they act and behave as this can communicate a lot about how they are coping.

“Listening” for the most pressing practical concerns that you might help them with.

How to do it:

Make the first move. Let them know you care and will take the time to listen. When we start the conversation about the disaster, we let others know that we are willing to talk about it. A simple question like “How’s it going?” is often enough to get a conversation started!

Understand that silence is OK.

Sometimes people aren’t ready or don’t want to talk. That’s OK for now; there’s no pressure. Sometimes just “being there” and spending time with them is enough to make a difference. They may not wish to talk about what happened, but it is important that your family, friends and neighbors do not feel alone after a disaster.



Understand there are no “right” or “wrong” ideas or feelings. After a disaster, just as each of us had our own experience with the disaster, each of us will have our own reactions (some will be like others and some different). There are no right or wrong feelings.

Share what you know about these common reactions.

Sharing this information can help others understand that they are no so different from anyone else. Just knowing about common reactions can be helpful.



Listen to what seems to be working for them on the road to bouncing back or has worked for them before. Help them build on what already is working for them.

Check back often. After you have listened to the concerns of your family, friends and neighbors, it is important to check back and see if you can help with anything else that may come up.

Let those around you know you are there if needed.

Just knowing that you are there and care can really make a difference.



Listen for things you can help them with

Listen for more serious risk factors and more severe reactions described on page 6:

This can help you determine if the individual may need to talk to a professional because of their difficult experiences. If you hear one or more of the items on the risk factor list, you can provide Listen, Protect and Connect psychological first aid.

If their reactions continue or get worse, you can then suggest that they talk to a professional, which can be an important step to recovery.



Although “Listen” is only the first step, you will continue to listen throughout your efforts as you provide psychological first aid.

2

Listen, **Protect** and Connect

After you've listened to the concerns of your family, friends and neighbors, the second step to supporting them after a disaster is to **protect** them from on-going stress where you can.



Protect means to do things to help them cope with the needs and concerns that you learned in the listening step. After you have listened, determine what things you can realistically help them solve and then provide that help.

- **Protect** includes offering information and ideas, giving resources and “pitching in” to support efforts to manage what has happened. By protecting others, you help the entire community “bounce back” faster.

Here are some examples of ways you can help protect your family, friends, and neighbors:

- **Provide first aid.** Learning first aid is one component of protecting as you prepare to respond in disasters. To learn more about how to protect yourself, your family, friends and neighbors, go to:
 - www.prepare2respond.org
 - www.redcrossla.org
 - www.cert-la.com
- **Help out with the basics: “first things first.”** Help them decide what their basic or practical needs are, such as having enough food, water, clothing, and other supplies. Help them directly with what they need right now. Practical needs may include identifying childcare so you can complete recovery paperwork or finding transportation as needed. They may also benefit from other services such as disaster recovery centers including the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the American Red Cross and the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health. Frequently after disasters, many highly specialized services become available. In Los Angeles, Emergency Network LA (ENLA) is a one-stop resource for many of these specialized services. ENLA can be contacted on the web at:
 - www.enla.org

- **Provide on-going sympathy and support to those around you who've had losses.** By expressing sympathy for what our family, friends, and neighbors have experienced in the disaster, we actually help protect and support their recovery.

Although we can't "fix" everything, just being there and offering support can go a long way. This action works best if it is frequent and on-going rather than just provided once.



- **Answer questions about what happened.**

Based on what you actually know, answer questions simply and honestly with updated information. This can help protect family, friends and neighbors from feelings and thoughts of uncertainty. It's OK if you don't always know the answers, especially since new information can be released many times per day.

- **Get updated information.** You can feel more confident sharing news, shelter information postings and other trusted sources with the most accurate information. For health concerns, the best place for information is from the Los Angeles County Department of Public Health, which can be found at:

- www.publichealth.lacounty.gov
- [Twitter@lapublichealth](https://twitter.com/lapublichealth)

- **Support others' actions.** Help protect feelings of worth by letting others know their actions are appreciated. If you have any contact with emergency responders in your community such as police, fire and rescue or even disaster volunteers, let them know you support and appreciate their actions – they benefit from the Listen, Protect and Connect steps, too!



- **Share what you learn that works.** You may be the first to help or the first one being helped. When you learn about community responses and recovery efforts, tell others. This can protect your family, friends, and neighbors from feeling overwhelmed and get them the things they need. You may also learn from them about resources that can help you. It's ok to ask about what you may need!
- **Encourage positive coping.** Help your family, friends, and neighbors think through what has worked for them before and *build on their own success stories*.
- **Remind them that their ideas and strategies have worth.** When we believe that our efforts are effective, we are likely to do better.



- **Reduce further disaster exposure.**

Disaster sights, sounds, and even smells can be distressing during and after disaster. You can protect others by reducing contact with these whenever possible.

For example, after a disaster you may return to work. One route may take you by

all of the destruction while another, although a bit longer, does not go through the disaster area. By taking the longer route, you can reduce your distress and feeling overwhelmed by what happened.

- **Limit media coverage of the disaster.** Encourage friends, family and neighbors to be mindful of how much disaster-related media time (e.g., TV, facebook, internet, Twitter) they are spending. Watching disaster images over and over again, for example, can make things worse, especially for children.
- **Encourage healthy behaviors and pacing yourself.** It can really help to take a break and to rest, relax, eat regularly, exercise and take time to focus on non-disaster related activities.
- **Develop a safety plan.** Having a plan helps protect and lessen worries about another disaster. Ideas for safety plans can be found at:
 - **Prepare2respond.org**
- **Keep an eye on children.** After a disaster, make sure children are never left alone. Even teenagers will benefit from having someone else around. It helps children when they know they are being protected by parents, family members and other trusted adults.

3 Listen, Protect and Connect

Now that you've begun psychological first aid with "Listen and Protect," the third step to supporting those around us after a disaster is to **"Connect."**

Providing a sense of support and connection to others is perhaps the most important thing anyone can do after a disaster. Reaching out to family, friends and neighbors can help you and those around you bounce back from a disaster.

Connect is reaching out to your family, friends and neighbors and also making new connections to others and resources around you in your community. Consider what you learned from them during the "Listen" and "Protect" steps.



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

- **Provide first aid.** You can give basic first aid to help your family, friends and neighbors. “Connect” them to emergency medical services as soon as you can (for example call 911, take them to a medical shelter, hospital or urgent care).
- **Find family members.** The American Red Cross has developed the “Safe and Well” system to help family members find each other. Visit the Safe and Well website of the American Red Cross:
 - **www.safeandwell.org**
- **Share the basics.** If you can, offer to share food, water, clothes, a place to stay or anything else they need.
- **Share resources.** As you find helpful services in your community share this information. This includes asking others for helpful resources they have found.





prepare2respond.org

<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/eprp>

www.enla.org

- **Spend extra time with family and friends.** Connect with family and friends, especially children, by spending a little extra time and providing a little extra attention each day to “Listen” and to “Protect.” This will be important to helping with everyone’s recovery and coping.
- **Continue Connecting.** Recovery efforts change over time. However, it is important to continue connecting with our family, friends and neighbors. Building new and maintaining old connections helps our resilience.



You have now learned the three steps to psychological first aid, “Listen, Protect and Connect.” These are actions everyone can do when a disaster hits in our community.

Remember...

As you are helping those around you with the Listen, Protect and Connect efforts, you are also impacted by the disaster. Taking care of yourself is a very important step. You are best able to help others when you also help yourself.

Remember, we are all in

Make sure to:

- **Share your thoughts, feelings, and concerns with friends and adult family members.**
- **Identify resources for yourself—it's OK to ask for information from those around you.**
- **Stay healthy by eating well and getting both rest and exercise.**
- **Take a break from disaster-related activities and find ways to enjoy time with your family, friends, and neighbors.**

this together!

Consider professional assistance if you, your family, or neighbors:

- Have one or more of the contributing “direct experience” risk factors mentioned on page 6
- Act or feel differently than usual and behavior does not get better over time
- Feel overwhelmed or overly stressed for a long period of time or after you have provided Listen, Protect and Connect psychological first aid
- Are not sure about how to handle a situation with members in the community

EXPECT RECOVERY

For More Information

Please Visit:

prepare2respond.org

**<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/eprp>
www.enla.org**



COUNTY OF LOS ANGELES

Public Health

<http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/eprp>

CENTER FOR DISASTER MEDICAL SCIENCES
UNIVERSITY of CALIFORNIA, IRVINE • SCHOOL OF MEDICINE



SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
UNIVERSITY of CALIFORNIA • IRVINE
Discover • Teach • Heal

Listen, Protect and Connect: family to family, neighbor to neighbor was customized by Merritt Schreiber, Ph.D. and Robin Gurwitch, Ph.D. for the County of Los Angeles Department of Public Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Program.

© Merritt Schreiber & Robin Gurwitch, 2011

All rights reserved

Copy editor/designer: Jessica Lee, Sinclair Labs Inc., Rev. F