

A 45-MINUTE INTRODUCTION

Psychological First Aid

How to genuinely help someone in the moments after a difficult or distressing event — without needing to be a professional counsellor.

This session introduces the core ideas of PFA. It is not a substitute for full accreditation — for that, see the Emergency Management Training Centre pathway.

Presented by Rachel Scott

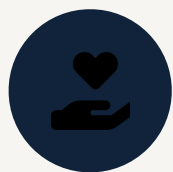
CDEM Volunteer, Geraldine CDEM Team · Community & Workforce Health Intelligence Limited

Session Outline

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| 1 | What PFA is — and isn't | 4 minutes |
| 2 | Who needs it, and the signs to watch for | 6 minutes |
| 3 | When to get more help | 3 minutes |
| 4 | The three action principles: Look, Listen, Link | 15 minutes |
| 5 | What to actually say | 4 minutes |
| 6 | Helping well: the basic do's and don'ts | 4 minutes |
| 7 | Supporting children and young people | 3 minutes |
| 8 | A practice moment | 4 minutes |
| 9 | Looking after yourself as the helper | 2 minutes |

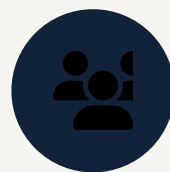
What Is Psychological First Aid?

A humane, supportive response to someone who has recently been through a distressing event — built on evidence, but designed to be delivered by anyone with basic training, not only professionals.



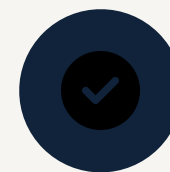
Practical, not clinical

It's about immediate comfort, safety, and connection — not diagnosis or treatment.



For anyone to learn

You don't need to be a psychologist or counsellor.
Most people who need PFA will receive it from
someone who isn't.



Evidence-informed

Based on the World Health Organization's PFA
framework, adapted and used across New
Zealand's CDEM welfare structure.

What PFA Is Not



It is not professional counselling or therapy.



It is not psychological debriefing — you never pressure someone to retell or analyse what happened.



It is not something only “qualified people” can do — anyone with basic training can offer it.



It is not a conversation with a fixed script — it's a way of paying attention and responding with care.



It does not mean every distressed person needs or wants it — respect it when someone declines.

Who Needs PFA — and Who Doesn't

PEOPLE WHO MAY BENEFIT

Anyone recently exposed to a crisis event — an emergency, an accident, a natural disaster, or any sudden, distressing situation — who is showing signs of distress and could benefit from calm, practical support.

EQUALLY IMPORTANT

Not everyone wants or needs help, and that's fine. Some people cope well on their own, or would rather be supported by someone they already know. Respecting a genuine “no” is part of doing PFA well, not a failure to help.

Signs to Watch For

Distress shows up differently in different people. These are common patterns — not a checklist to diagnose, just things worth noticing.



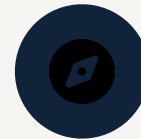
Physical

Shaking, rapid breathing, feeling numb, fatigue, being easily startled.



Emotional

Fear, sadness, guilt, anger, feeling overwhelmed or emotionally flat.



Cognitive

Confusion, difficulty concentrating, trouble making simple decisions.



Behavioural

Withdrawing from others, pacing, being unable to sit still, avoiding people or places.

When to Get More Help

PFA is not the right response to everything. Recognising when someone needs more than you can offer is part of doing this well — not a failure.

GET EMERGENCY OR PROFESSIONAL HELP IMMEDIATELY IF SOMEONE:

- Talks about suicide, self-harm, or not wanting to be here
- Is a danger to themselves or someone else
- Cannot function or care for themselves or their children at all
- Is having a severe medical reaction — injury, chest pain, breathing difficulty
- Is completely unresponsive, or in a state you feel out of your depth with

Three Action Principles: Look, Listen, Link



LOOK

Check for safety, and for people with urgent needs or serious distress.



LISTEN

Approach people who may need support, ask about their needs, and help them feel calmer.



LINK

Help people meet basic needs, access services, and reconnect with support around them.

These aren't rigid steps — they often overlap, and you may move between them.

ACTION PRINCIPLE ONE

LOOK



Check for immediate safety — for yourself, and for others around you.



Check for people with obvious, urgent physical needs — injury, medical needs, immediate danger.



Check for people showing serious distress reactions — extreme agitation, being unresponsive, or unable to care for themselves or their children.



Take a moment before approaching anyone — notice what's actually happening before you act.

ACTION PRINCIPLE TWO

LISTEN



Approach someone who may need support — introduce yourself, and ask if you can help.



Ask about their needs and concerns, in plain, simple language — not a checklist or an interview.



Listen to understand, not to fix — you don't need to have an answer for everything they say.



Help them feel calm — a steady, unhurried presence often does more than words.

FINDING THE WORDS

What to Actually Say

TO OPEN A CONVERSATION

- “Hi, my name's [name]. Is it okay if I sit with you for a moment?”
- “I can see this has been a really hard day. How are you doing right now?”
- “Is there anything practical I can help with right now?”

PHRASES TO AVOID

- “I know exactly how you feel” — you don't, and it can feel dismissive
- “At least it wasn't worse” — minimises what they're feeling right now
- “You need to talk about what happened” — let them lead, never push

If you don't know what to say, silence and a calm presence are enough. You don't need the perfect sentence — you need to actually be there.

ACTION PRINCIPLE THREE

LINK



Help people address basic, practical needs — shelter, water, safety — before anything else.



Help them access services and information relevant to their situation.



Help them cope, using their own existing strengths and ways of managing.



Connect them with loved ones and social support — people they already trust matter more than we do.

Helping Well: The Basics

DO

- Be honest and trustworthy about who you are and what you can offer
- Respect people's right to make their own decisions
- Keep what people tell you private, as far as you reasonably can
- Be aware of your own assumptions and set them aside

DON'T

- Pressure anyone to tell their story or share details they haven't offered
- Make promises you can't keep
- Judge what someone did or didn't do
- Take over — support people's own decisions, don't make choices for them

Supporting Children and Young People



Get down to their physical level — sit or crouch rather than standing over them.



Use simple, honest, age-appropriate language. Don't promise things you can't guarantee.



Keep them with a trusted adult wherever possible — a familiar person matters more than anything you can offer.



Expect regression — younger behaviour, clinginess, or difficulty settling are normal reactions, not a problem to fix.



Let them ask questions, and answer honestly at a level they can understand, without overwhelming detail.

TRY IT

A Quick Practice Moment

SCENARIO

Someone at a community event has just found out their street has been affected by flooding. They're pacing, not speaking much, and keep checking their phone.

With a partner, talk through:

- What would LOOK actually involve here, before you approach them?
- What might you say first, to open LISTEN well?
- What's one practical LINK you could offer in this situation?

DON'T SKIP THIS

Looking After Yourself

Supporting someone else through a hard moment takes something out of you too — even when it goes well. This is not optional or an afterthought.



Know your own limits, and it's okay to hand over to someone else



Take breaks — you cannot pour from an empty cup



Talk to someone you trust afterwards, especially after a hard interaction



Notice if it's affecting your own sleep, mood, or wellbeing over time, and act on it

Where This Fits



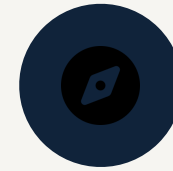
Full accreditation

This 30-minute session is an introduction. Full Psychological First Aid training is available through the Emergency Management Training Centre.



The Geraldine Welfare Committee

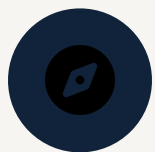
PFA is one of the core skills the Welfare Committee is being built around — today's session is a first step, not the whole picture.



Community Civics, Wellness & Emergency Management Hubs

Ongoing PFA training will be part of what the Hub delivers, repeated regularly, not taught once and forgotten.

Quick Recap



Look

Check for safety, urgent needs, and serious distress before you approach.



Listen

Approach calmly, ask about needs, and help someone feel a little steadier.



Link

Connect people to practical support, services, and the people who already matter to them.



Look After Yourself

This work costs you something too — that's not a sign you're doing it wrong.

THANK YOU

Look. Listen. Link.

Questions welcome — and thank you for being someone your community can rely on.



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