



BSA SAFETY MOMENT

PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID

SUMMARY

The purpose of psychological first aid is to provide basic care, comfort, and support to anyone experiencing stress. Stay alert to signs of stress in yourself and others.

GENERAL INFORMATION

All of us experience stress. Family issues, the death of a loved one, natural disasters, trauma, or even exams, arguments, or breakups can be stressful. Individuals respond differently to stress, depending upon our coping mechanisms. Negative symptoms of stress include physical complaints, behavioral changes, or emotional instability. Results may be devastating when people can't find ways to cope effectively with what happened.

Some symptoms of poor coping strategies include:

- Excessive alcohol or drug use
- Not taking care of oneself
- Withdrawing from family, friends, and activities
- Blaming others
- Overeating or failing to eat
- Working too much
- Too much time spent alone
- Violent reactions or conflict with others

How to Help

- Listen and strive to be kind, calm, and compassionate.
- Respond to basic needs and provide a safe place.
- Seek professional counseling when necessary.
- Get adequate rest and eat healthy meals.
- As much as possible, maintain a normal schedule.
- Use relaxation methods such as breathing exercises, meditation, listening to soothing music, etc.
- Encourage positive, distracting activities like Scouting, sports, reading, and exercising in moderation.
- Just as with physical injuries, allow adequate time for healing.

Be aware that as a caregiver, you too may encounter increased stress. Be alert to your own needs. Some of the interventions above may apply to you as well.

When You Can't Help

Stress can sometimes require professional mental health assistance. If a person shows extreme reactions that don't improve or seem to worsen—and especially if they express a desire or intent to harm themselves or others—you should immediately help them find a qualified caregiver. In addition, professionals may need to intervene if someone cannot be calmed down, has irrational fears, uses poor judgment, or cannot sleep.

REFERENCES

- *Psychological First Aid: Helping People in Times of Stress*; American National Red Cross, September 2006
- *Psychological First Aid: Field Operations Guide*, 2nd edition; National Child Traumatic Stress Network, National Center for PTSD, 2006