

Psychological first aid

Psychological first aid (PFA) addresses the immediate needs of people who have been affected by an occupational violence (OV) incident. It is understood that individuals who are impacted by events outside of their control may have difficulty coping in the period immediately after the incident (and this may continue for a period of time).

PFA provides a process by which an individual (who was not affected by the incident) can provide immediate support to the affected individual/s by using simple techniques. These techniques include being observant (looking), making themselves available (listening) and creating connections (linking). The 'Look, Listen, and Link' framework is well described by the [Australian Red Cross, Psychological First Aid: Supporting people affected by disaster in Australia](#).

Look, Listen and Link

The '**Look, Listen and Link**' framework requires an assessment of the environment and the situation to determine whether there are safety concerns that need to be addressed. The individual leading the delivery of PFA will be aiming to create a sense of calm and connection with those affected, helping them to self-identify solutions and options for self-managing any concerns or issues, or the capacity to access support services.

Immediate support may be about providing practical solutions that allow the affected workers to address issues, such as whether they need time to debrief, contact next of kin, leave early, get assistance with writing up notes for the incident, arrange transport home, need a lift, a follow up phone call or assistance contacting ACT Policing.

LOOK

Ensure safety

Before you begin it is important to assess the immediate situation (i.e., environment and people) for any safety issues or risks. Where possible address those before you provide psychological first aid support.

Situation	Identifying any safety issues or risks
Environment	What are the hazards that need to be cleaned/cleared?
People	Do you need to treat injuries or move people to safety?

Assess workers in need

You can assess whether an individual needs PFA by observing their behaviours and actions immediately after the event. There is no 'right' response to OV as everyone responds to stressful or traumatic events differently. However, there are some known responses that may be experienced/evidenced to be aware of.

Short and Long Term Responses	
 Physical	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• OV trauma• Nausea• Shaking• Heart Palpitations• Headaches• Aches & pains
 Emotional	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Confusion• Anger• Feelings of Dread• Stress, Depression, Anxiety, PTSD• Sadness• Guilt• Helplessness• Numbness/shock
 Behavioural	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sleep disturbances• Withdrawal• Avoidance of reminders• Alcohol/drug use• Apathy• Easily irritable
 Cognitive	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Intrusive Thoughts• Memory blanks• Flashbacks• Thoughts of self-blame• Ruminating thoughts• Difficulty concentrating• Feelings of isolation or dislocation

Factors that may exacerbate the individual's response to an OV event include:

- limited social supports
- previous experience or exposure to OV incidents or similar incidents
- if there was a perceived threat to life during the event (or because of the incident)
- they have existing health concerns
- there are other stressful events occurring in their life.

LISTEN

When you make the time to listen to the individual and how they are feeling, you are giving them the opportunity to address what is concerning them and identify to them that you recognise their immediate needs.

Factors you may consider that will make the listening a positive experience:

- Start the communication process as soon as you can after the OV incident, then maintain regular communication with the workers (even if they return to work immediately).
- Be led by the workers for how and when you will communicate.
- Be honest about the support you can provide.
- Focus on their needs, their experiences and the issues that are concerning them.
- Make sure you have a quiet and private space in which to listen and engage with them.
- Make sure you have enough time to listen and are not rushed.
- Be patient and wait to hear all that they have to say, without interruptions.
- Acknowledge what they have shared with you.
- Reinforce that there is no set response to an OV incident and encourage them to be open about how they are feeling, and how they have been affected.

LINK

Undertaking PFA does not mean that you need to come up with all the solutions. The process is more about the individual being able to self-identify solutions that they can support themselves with. Your role in this process is to:

- help them identify the issues concerning them
- help them identify practical solutions that work for them to address their concerns such as connecting with their friends and family or implementing self-care practices
- provide them with details of the confidential Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
- provide details of other services they may wish to engage with and, as required, referring the individual to those services
- talk with worker about the benefits of an early safe return to work and how this may help with the recovery process
- as required, help them navigate the workers' compensation process.

Important note

Providing PFA does not include providing treatment or diagnosis (medical or other) and it is not intended to be a critical incident debriefing process. Rather, the intention of PFA is that the support is practical, helps to reduce the initial distress caused by the incident and increases the individual's capacity to cope. Whilst it is a valuable tool, it may not be required by everyone.

To learn more:

- ACTHD & CHS managers can book in to PFA training through [HRIMS](#).
- CPHB managers will need to access the [Great Workplaces Program](#).

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

ACT Health acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land, the Ngunnawal people. ACT Health respects their continuing culture and connections to the land and the unique contributions they make to the life of this area. ACT Health also acknowledges and welcomes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who are part of the community we serve.

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