

## PFA-S Provider Care

Providing support in the immediate aftermath of crisis can be an enriching professional and personal experience that enhances satisfaction through helping others. It can also be physically and emotionally exhausting. The following provides information to consider when responding to an emergency at a school.

### Common Stress Reactions

You may experience a number of stress responses, which are considered common when working with survivors:

- Increase or decrease in activity level
- Difficulties sleeping
- Substance use
- Disconnection and numbing
- Irritability, anger, and frustration
- Vicarious traumatization in the form of shock, fearfulness, horror, helplessness
- Confusion, lack of attention, and difficulty making decisions
- Physical reactions (headaches, stomachaches, easily startled)
- Depressive or anxiety reactions
- Decreased social activities
- Diminished self-care

### Extreme Stress Reactions

You may experience more serious stress responses that warrant seeking professional support or monitoring by a supervisor. These include:

Sense of helplessness

Preoccupation or compulsive re-experiencing of trauma experienced either directly or indirectly

Attempts to over-control in professional or personal situations, or act out a “rescuer complex”

Social withdrawal and isolation

Chronic exhaustion

Survival coping strategies like relying on substances, overly preoccupied by work, or drastic changes in sleeping or eating patterns

Serious difficulties in interpersonal relationships, including domestic violence

Depression accompanied by hopelessness

Suicidal ideation or attempts

Unnecessary risk-taking

Illness or an increase in levels of pain

Changes in memory and perception

Disruption in your perceptions of safety, trust, and independence

School administration and leadership can help support providers by reducing the risk of extreme stress through implementing procedures and policies. Consider:

- Encouraging work breaks
- Rotating of providers from the most highly exposed assignments to lesser levels of exposure
- Identifying enough supports to meet the needs of administration, staff, students, and families
- Encouraging peer partners and peer consultation
- Monitoring providers who meet certain high risk criteria, such as: those who have been directly exposed to the event, those having regular exposure to severely affected individuals or families, those with multiple stresses (e.g., family changes, health problems)
- Ensuring regular supervision, case conferencing, staff appreciation events
- Conducting trainings on stress management practices and encourage the use of such practices
- Supporting open communication

## Self-Care

Self-care is the ability to engage in helping others without sacrificing other important parts of one's life. It's taking responsibility for job functions you have control over, the ability to maintain a positive attitude towards the work despite challenges, and your right to be well, safe, and fulfilled.

It's important to remember that self-care is not an emergency response plan to be activated when stress becomes overwhelming or that having a good self-care plan means you are acting selfishly. Healthy self-care can renew our spirits and help us become more resilient.

Think of self-care as having three basic aspects:

Awareness	The first step is to seek awareness. This requires you to slow down and focus inwardly to determine how you are feeling, what your stress level is, what types of thoughts are going through your head, and whether your behaviors and actions are consistent with the who you want to be.
Balance	The second step is to seek balance in all areas of your life including work, personal and family life, rest, and leisure. You will be more productive when you've had opportunities to rest and relax. Becoming aware of when you are losing balance in your life gives you an opportunity to change.
Connection	The final step is connection. It involves building connections and supportive relationships with your co-workers, friends, family, and community. One of the most powerful stress reducers is social connection.

## Self-Care Checklist

There are several ways you can find balance, be aware of your needs, and make connections. Use this list to help you decide which self-care strategies will work for you.

### Make every effort to:

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|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seek out and give social support  | <input type="checkbox"/> Access supervision routinely to share concerns, identify difficult experiences and strategize to solve problems |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Check in with other colleagues to discuss the response to the emergency                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Anticipate that you will experience recurring thoughts or dreams, and that they will decrease over time         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Schedule time for a vacation or gradual reintegration into your normal life               | <input type="checkbox"/> Keep a journal to get worries off your mind   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Prepare for worldview changes that may not be mirrored by others in your life             | <input type="checkbox"/> Ask for help in parenting, if you feel irritable or are having difficulties adjusting back to your routine      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Participate in formal help if extreme stress persists for greater than two to three weeks | <input type="checkbox"/> Plan for family/home safety, including making child care and pet care plans                                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Increase leisure activities, stress management, and exercise                              | <input type="checkbox"/> Practice brief relaxation techniques during the workday   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pay extra attention to health and nutrition   | <input type="checkbox"/> Use a buddy system to share upsetting emotional responses   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Self-monitor and pace your efforts  | <input type="checkbox"/> Stay aware of limitations and needs   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Maintain boundaries: delegate, say “no,” and avoid getting overloaded with work           | <input type="checkbox"/> Recognize when one is Hungry, Angry, Lonely or Tired (HALT), and take the appropriate self-care measures        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Pay extra attention to rekindling close interpersonal relationships                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Increase activities that are positive   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Practice good sleep routines  | <input type="checkbox"/> Practice religious faith, philosophy, spirituality  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Make time for self-reflection   | <input type="checkbox"/> Spend time with family and friends  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Find things that you enjoy or make you laugh  | <input type="checkbox"/> Learn how to “put stress away”  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Try at times not to be in charge or the “expert”  | <input type="checkbox"/> Write, draw, paint  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Increase experiences that have spiritual or philosophical meaning to you                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Limit caffeine, cigarettes, and substance use   |

Be careful of engaging in activities that can hinder your attempts at good self-care. Avoid:

- Extended periods of solo work without colleagues or working “round the clock” with few breaks
- Negative self-talk that reinforces feelings of inadequacy or incompetency
- Common attitudinal obstacles to self-care (e.g., “It would be selfish to take time to rest.”)
- Negatively assessing your contribution
- Use of excessive use of alcohol, illicit drugs, or excessive amounts of prescription drugs