

Psychological first-aid for sufferers of trauma and anxiety

Preliminary notes

- You don't need to do all of the things mentioned in these notes / the webinar in order for your intervention to be significant. Suffice that you provide the person with a sense of connection, calm them down and normalize their situation, and you have already done a lot!
- The emotions that trauma victims feel - the helplessness, the terror, and more - their caregivers feel as well. It is important that therapists working with trauma receive support for themselves. If you do not have support, seek to join a peer group or ask for supervision. If you feel that your own mental health is becoming compromised, take load off yourself and let others carry the burden.

Trauma is the reaction of a person to an experience that is so horrible and frightening, that it goes beyond his coping ability.

I will be focusing on the emotional experience of a person who is in trauma, and how we as mental health professionals can give first aid. It is important to emphasize that this is first aid, it is not regular psychological treatment for trauma.

The therapeutic encounter

A person suffering from trauma is in a very distressed mental state. Below is a list of aspects of this experience, and what could be a good attitude on the side of the therapist to address them.

Loneliness	The traumatized person feels forsaken, very alone	Emphasize the connection	"Yes, we only met now, but at this moment I am with you, completely with you. Try to feel me with you."
Terror	The traumatized person feels very scared, might even think that they are losing their mind	Normalize, Calm them down	I see that you are anxious and overwhelmed / disconnected. It is a natural response to trauma, a normal response to an abnormal situation. It is ok to ask for help when you are worried or anxious. It is very likely that once the danger passes what you're experience will calm down significantly, you will not keep feeling like this. I'm here to help you, I know how to help in situations like this.
Dehumanization	The traumatized person has been subject to inhumane cruelty, and feel stripped of their humanity	Remind them that they are human	"Tell me about your children. How old are they? What are they doing? What are you doing in life? Do you like your profession? What kind of things do you do in normal times for enjoyment?"
Ego collapse	Trauma by definition is more that a person can bear. So the person	Remind them of their resilience	"We all have natural abilities to cope with crisis situations. Every person copes differently. Tell me about the things in life that give you strength and support in difficult times."

	feels that their strength has failed them		(Family, friends, community, religious faith...) "Can think of them, and how they would be willing to help you and support you in difficult times? Maybe even imagine them standing next to you".
Loss of control	The traumatized person was helpless in the face of trauma and feel that they have lost control	Reestablish a sense of control	"What can you do right now, even something small, that will improve the situation a little bit?" It can be very empowering if he can do something that will help another person cope with the situation When offering something to do, it is best to give two choices
Emotional flooding	The traumatized person may experience a flooding of emotion	Don't trigger emotions	Try to avoid saying things like: "It must feel awful", "You're so scared..." This can be done later on, when processing of the trauma in the setting of psychological treatment.
Rupture in the continuation of existence		Encourage them to perform routine activities	Less relevant while the state of emergency is still occurring, but you can still try - brushing teeth, breakfast, any such regular pattern, do not give up

Sample encounter

<The following is only an illustration. A lively, authentic human encounter is important above anything else>

"My name is Ori. I am a clinical psychologist. I am from Israel. I am with you now, I am here to help you. I know how to help in such situations. What is your name?"

"Ivan. Tell me, Ivan. Where are you right now? Where is your family?" "How old are you?" Short, informative questions, that ground the person in reality. No complex questions.

- It is good to repeat the name of the person because it emphasizes his existence and humanity.

"What do you feel that you need help with, Ivan" <if necessary>

"I can see that you are anxious and overwhelmed / disconnected. This is a natural response to trauma; a normal response to an abnormal situation. Many others react just like that. It is very likely that these feeling will calm down significantly once the danger is over. I suggest we do an exercise to help you relax \ and connect back to reality, is that okay with you?"

- This would be a good point to give a choice between two exercises. Giving a choice makes the person feel active and that they have some degree of control.

"Before we start, it is helpful in these types of situations to remember things in life that give us strength and support in difficult times. Who can you normally turn to for help?" <close friends / community, religious faith...> Can you take a moment to remember them, maybe imagine them standing by your side right now, perhaps even imagine them putting their hands on your back and supporting you. Can

feel it?"

Tools

Anxiety

Diaphragmic breathing

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kgTL5G1iblo>

Body scan

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QS2yDmWk0vs>

Guided imagery

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JNZyq3vMOPI>

Grounding

Anything that brings the person back to reality, use the senses

5-4-3-2-1 exercise

<https://www.mondaycampaigns.org/destress-monday/unwind-monday-5-4-3-2-1-grounding-technique#:~:text=That's%20where%20the%205%2D4,the%20way%20of%20your%20progress.>

- Describe 5 things that you see
- Choose 4 things to feel/touch
- Focus on 3 sounds that you are hearing
- Smell 2 things
- Taste 1 thing

Hold ice cube in hand

The part about children will be elaborated on in another webinar, and notes will be shared in that context