Psychological First Aid

Wednesday April 15th, 2020

In collaboration with the Academic Affairs Office, Faculty of Medicine and Telemachus Scholars Program and Dr. Lisa Koski, Associate Professor, Departments of Neurology and Neurosurgery & Department of Psychology (Professional) McGill University
Preface

Pandemic

= All are affected, directly or indirectly
= Care for **self** as well as others

Productivity

- Understand the **context**
- Costs of **controlled** vs. **automatic** processing
Psychological First Aid

A method of

– Helping people in distress so they feel calm and supported to cope better with their challenges
– Assisting someone to manage their situation and make informed decisions
– Normalizing worry and other emotions
AIMS

- Enhance sense of control
- Reinforce good personal choices and positive coping strategies
- Encourage to seek support from others in social network
What it is NOT

• Insight-oriented: Avoid interpreting others’ statements, reactions
• Psychotherapy
• Psychological debriefing: Person briefly and systematically describes their thoughts, beliefs, and emotional reactions to a traumatic event
CORE PRINCIPLES: 3 Ls

LOOK
- Give full attention
- Observe reactions

LISTEN
- Active listening
- Caring & showing empathy

LINK
Practical assistance with
- Problem-solving
- Help to access basic needs
- Refer to other resources for further assistance
COMMUNICATION

• Listen attentively
• Speak slowly, clearly, calmly
• Modulate tone of voice, facial expressions, body language, to express warmth, empathy
• Use affirmative sounds, nods, etc.
• Acknowledge person’s feelings and understanding of situation
• Allow venting of frustration
USEFUL PHRASES

• Tell me a bit about what worries you
• WHAT. WHERE. WHO. WHEN.
• It is a challenging situation as there are many things still not known about the virus, and it's quite normal to react and be worried.
• It can be overwhelming, so maybe we can talk about how to manage the feelings. The first step is to acknowledge the feelings as you rightly do, the next to ensure they don't take up too much time or space in your life. Should we maybe talk more on this?
• It is a difficult situation, and I do understand it's very challenging. Let's discuss if there is anything you can do to make the situation more tolerable.
• I am not sure I can answer that question for you. What are you thinking about when having to make this decision?
• It seems you read a lot on social media about the virus. Could you tell me more about where you get your information? Do you also visit the official websites?
• If you are interested I can mail you a resource on what to do when in isolation. You may find it useful. Should I do that?
AVOID

• WHY
• Pressure to speak, allow for silences
• Being judgmental
• Technical jargon
• Talking about self, personal issue or worries
• False promises or false assurances
• Sharing other people’s stories or examples
• Exploiting trust or confidentiality
Link

Assist in:

• accessing information
• connecting with loved ones and social support
• tackling practical problems
• accessing services and other help.
Useful Recommendations

• Stay digitally connected to social group: watch movie together, book club, morning coffee
• Plan and stick to a daily routine: Be sure to include time for self-care
• Support setting realistic goals to stay active
• Living with others: Plan alone activities, and together activities
• Find humour when possible
• Accept feelings (frustration, second-guessing, self-blame, anxiety) as a normal reaction to an abnormal situation
Calming Techniques

For self or when supporting another

• Breathing exercises
• Muscle relaxation exercises
• Grounding exercise: 5 things you see, 3-4 you hear, smell and/or taste
• Cardiovascular exercise
• Good sources for on-line yoga, exercises, relaxation or mindfulness
Refer for specialized psychological help if

- Unable to sleep for the last week, confused and disoriented
- So distressed that unable to function normally and care for themselves or their children (eating, hygiene)
- Loses control over their behaviour, unpredictable or destructive behaviour
- Threatens harm to self or others
- Excessive and out-of-the-ordinary use of drugs or alcohol
- Living with psychological disorder and/or were taking medication prior to the situation of distress
- Chronic health conditions and need more supports.
- Symptoms of severe mental health conditions
- Experiencing violence or sexual abuse
Concluding the Intervention

• Obtain consent to send information, e.g. email, or to make referral and make sure to follow up as soon as possible
• Summarize key issues discussed, including positive actions already taken
• Emphasize action points for future
• Agree if follow-up conversation is needed and choose a time
• Thank them for trusting you with this and wish them a good day
Lisa’s Final Comments

Thank-you to everyone for your interest and participation in this session. During this pandemic most of us have found ourselves in the unprecedented position of moving fluidly - or sometimes violently and unexpectedly - between the roles of Supporter and Supported.

As a Supporter, we may feel uncertain about what to say and how to help the other person. We may expect ourselves to have all the answers when approached by those who normally consult us for our expertise. We may feel helpless to know what to say or how to make things better. The psychological first aid approach acknowledges that we do not have all the answers or the power to change the unchangeable. It gives us a concrete and evidence-based framework for helping others using the tools that are provided to all humans: Listening, empathizing, empowering, and problem-solving in a collaborative way.

And for the moments when we need support, the PFA framework reminds us that it is helpful and productive to reach out to our own social network for support and acceptance, for encouragement, and for creative solutions to the new problems confronting us.

My last slide includes links to key resources for more information on Psychological First Aid.
REFERENCES

• Source of info for this presentation by Red Cross (English)
  https://reliefweb.int/search/results?search=Remote+Psychological+First+Aid+during+the+COVID-19+outbreak

• Webinar and links from RRSPQ-RS (French)
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovq_gqtlX4k&feature=youtu.be

• PDF from WHO (multiple languages, not coronavirus-specific):
  https://www.who.int/mental_health/publications/guide_field_workers/en/

• Private company providing recommendations for digital tools and apps for managing pandemic-related distress:
  https://www.therappx.com/covid-19/