

## Compassionate Response to Staff Regarding Significant Events and Disclosures

### During and after a critical incident

All schools need a formal process or protocol for addressing a critical incident, defined as an incident in which someone was harmed.

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network and the National Center for PTSD are pleased to make the Psychological First Aid for Schools Field Operations Guide and accompanying handouts available. Psychological First Aid for Schools is an evidence-informed approach for assisting children, adolescents, adults, and families in the aftermath of a school crisis, disaster, or terrorism event.

#### Proactive preparation:

1. Define expectations around communication, what to do and what not to do
2. Identify and train members of a crisis team
3. Identify protocols for staff support

#### In the crisis:

1. Offer Psychological First Aid – Stay with a person, use their name, provide information.
2. Engage the crisis team or other trained professional as needed and requested by the person.

#### After the crisis:

1. Implement protocols for staff support
2. Consider whether restorative circle would be applicable

### When a staff member discloses their own significant psychological pain

Do: Offer consistent emotional support, provide information, give practical help, acknowledge the limits of what you can do, give them hope.

- Be non-judgmental
- Be genuine and respectful
- Be comfortable with silence
- Be aware that the person's feelings are very real
- Be positive with your feedback
- Be aware of your body language and facial expressions
- Be helpful with language without telling them how they feel or 'should' feel

Do not: Give advice, make promises you cannot keep, dismiss the problem or their emotions, focus on 'right' vs. 'wrong,' try to 'fix' the situation, engage in communication that is: belittling, sarcastic, or patronizing.



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### De-escalating the situation

- Appear confident, stay calm, and avoid nervous behavior
- Speak slowly and confidently with a gentle, caring tone of voice
- Do not argue or challenge the person
- Do not threaten
- Do not raise your voice
- Do not talk too fast
- Use positive words
- Take a break from the conversation

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### A Sensitive Conversation with a Staff Member to Address a Referral for Support

*You are wondering what to do in your role as colleague or boss when you see an educator struggling with stress who may need professional help. It starts with a sensitive conversation that explores the stress and what support looks like from the person's perspective. In fact, the first few times these discussions happen, you may not even discuss referrals. It is essential for a person to feel your care and support before a referral is offered. These tips will set the stage.*

1. Approach the person of concern in a nonjudgmental way.
2. The tone of the initial conversation is important. The employee may be afraid to reveal their vulnerability or fear that they are being evaluated in some way. They may fear losing their job.
3. Meet with them privately. Emphasize that this is just between the two of you and is a **confidential** conversation.
4. Start positively by indicating that all educators deserve to be well and supported to be at their best at work. It's a tough job.
5. "I have noticed...(list behavioral signs of stress you have observed) and I was wondering how I can best support you."
6. Start with **open-ended questions**...
  - Is this observation (my concerns) a good fit for what is true for you?
  - What do you need to be at your best at work? We all need to feel supported at work. What would good support here at school look like for you?
  - I wonder how your collegial relationships are going, and what might help might be beneficial from your peers here at work?
  - What about work/life balance? How might that be adjusted?
  - Teaching requires you to "be on" all the time. I wonder how you can get breaks or support throughout your work day?
7. Listen carefully and without judgment as the person describes what is happening for them. A strong emotional response (tears) or defensiveness is normal. Remain calm and compassionate.