

# ELEMENTS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID



NEW SOUTH WALES



## 1. Promote Safety

- Removing people from or reducing exposure to threat of harm.



## 2. Promote Calm

- Listen to people who wish to share their stories, emphasising there is no right or wrong way to feel.
- As much as possible, provide a calm environment.
- Helping people meet their basic needs.



## 3. Promote Connectedness

- Identify and link people with colleagues or people they feel comfortable with, as well as internal avenues of support.
- Help people contact friends and loved ones.



## 4. Promote Self & Community Efficacy

- Encourage people to meet their own needs.
- Foster adaptive coping and self-care strategies.



## 5. Promote Hope

- Find ways to enhance people's natural resilience.
- Normalise feelings post incident.

## Signs of Psychological Distress to look out for in the days/weeks following an incident:

### Emotional

Emotional outbursts or distress  
Reduction in empathy  
Irritability  
Rapid changes in mood  
Prolonged grief, anxiety, or sadness

### Cognitive

Cynicism/negativity  
Judgmental of others  
Invasive thoughts  
Difficulty concentrating  
Difficulty making day-to-day decisions  
Reduced motivation

### Behavioural

Increased use of drugs or alcohol  
Avoidance/withdrawal  
Decreased productivity  
Absenteeism  
Presenteeism  
Errors in tasks

### Physical

Changes in physical appearance  
Headaches, stomach aches  
Startle response  
Fidgety / restless  
Sleep difficulties  
Weight loss / weight gain

## Which of these are we more likely to notice in others?

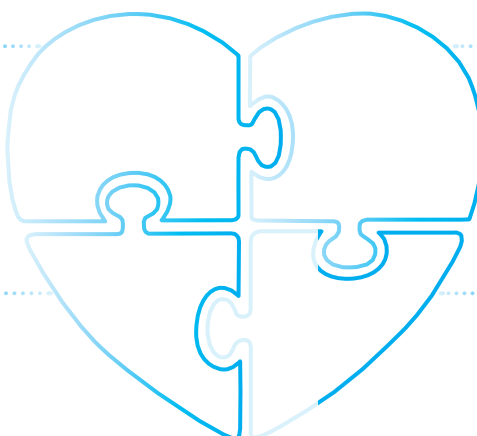
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## How to have a conversation



### PREPARE for the conversation

- Where can you go that's not isolated but quiet?
- When is the best (not perfect) time for you and them?
- What might you say during the conversation? Reflect on any changes in behaviours you have seen/heard



### START the conversation. Sometimes just starting it is the hardest part

- Stick to **behaviours you can see/hear** only. Don't assume you know what's happening or, worse still, give them a diagnosis!
- Use open-ended questions to encourage the person with more than 'yes' or 'no'
  - "How are you? I'm asking because I've noticed..."
  - "It's really unlike you to be so quiet. How are you travelling?"



### SHOW THE YOU'RE LISTENING by giving your full attention (avoid distractions, assumptions & advice)

- Repeat to them what you think they're telling you, e.g., "so you're saying that..."
- Ask them if it sounds like you've understood them. "Have I got that right?"
- Use **open body language** – use eye contact and sit in a relaxed position – remember it's not a job interview!



### Show **EMPATHY**. Tell them you've listened to how they feel, not just what they're saying

- "That sounds pretty tough / overwhelming / frustrating."
- "I may not know what you are going through but I'm glad you're talking to me about this."
- "I can see this is a really hard time for you. How do you think I can best support you through this?"



### Discuss **SUPPORT** and **COPING**

- Ask if they've had a similar experience before and whether they found anything helpful and could do those things again
- Encourage and assist them to seek professional **HELP** from a EAP, MAP or mental health worker (e.g., counsellor or psychologist) e.g. "Have you thought about talking to someone? I am very concerned about you and want to help you get support. Could we discuss some options?"