CRISIS READY MEDIA
SAFER JOURNALISTS. STRONGER STORIES.

MENTAL WELLNESS INFOSHEET

Psychological first aid

Listen. Protect. Connect. A simple way for any journalist to support a colleague after a distressing assignment. No clinical skills required, just empathy, presence and a commitment to care.

1 What it is

Peer support, not therapy

Psychological first aid (PFA) is a compassionate, evidence-informed way to reduce initial distress and help a person begin to cope after a distressing event. It is designed for laypeople.

- ✕ It is not counseling, diagnosis or treatment
- ✕ It is not a debrief that pushes someone to relive the event
- ✕ It is not about fixing the person or solving the problem

2 When to use it

Early, and more often than you think

- ☐ After breaking news of a tragedy
- ☐ After witnessing violence or interviewing trauma survivors
- ☐ After editing or reviewing graphic material
- ☐ When a colleague returns from a violent or emotional story
- ☐ When someone is struggling but has not said so

You do not need a crisis. A casual check-in the day after a hard assignment counts.

3 How to use it

Three steps, in order

1 Listen

Hear what the person needs and how they are feeling, without judgment.

- ☐ Let them speak without interrupting
- ☐ Allow silences
- ☐ Face them. Relax your posture
- ☐ Reflect back what you heard
- ☐ Hold the advice

SAY
"You seemed a bit off after that last assignment. Do you want to talk about it?"
"That sounds really hard."

2 Protect

Guard their emotional and physical space by reducing added stress.

- ☐ Offer privacy and a quiet, low-pressure place to decompress
- ☐ Help reduce their immediate workload
- ☐ Bring a coffee
- ☐ Reassure them they are not being judged
- ☐ Keep it confidential

SAY
"You're not alone. This kind of reaction happens to a lot of us."

3 Connect

Link them to resources, peers or additional help if they need it.

- ☐ Offer options without pushing
- ☐ Know your newsroom's support: employee assistance program, peer support, HR
- ☐ Suggest a trusted peer or mentor
- ☐ Follow up later. Check in gently and regularly

SAY
"Would you like to talk to someone?"
"How are you doing after yesterday's coverage?"

4 What stops people

And how to work around it

- ☐ **"I'll say the wrong thing."** You do not need the right words. Listening is the help
- ☐ **"It's not my place."** Peer support is everyone's place. That is the point of PFA
- ☐ **"There's no time."** Even a two-minute check-in helps
- ☐ **"We tough it out here."** That culture is what PFA is meant to interrupt

5 Make it a newsroom norm

A mindset, not a formal program

- ☐ Start meetings with a short check-in. No deep dives
- ☐ Editors and team leads model it and talk openly about stress and recovery
- ☐ Create a decompression space, even if it is just a quiet room with a couch
- ☐ Make support resources easy to find
- ☐ Train the whole team in Listen, Protect, Connect

PFA isn't about fixing someone. It's about being a human in the room when someone else is hurting.

WHEN PEER SUPPORT IS NOT ENOUGH

If a colleague may be in immediate danger or talks about suicide, stay with them and get help now. In the United States, call or text 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, or call 911.

This infosheet is general guidance drawn from the Crisis Ready Media HEFAT curriculum and the Crisis Ready Report, "Psychological first aid: peer support that matters." It is not medical or mental health advice and does not replace professional care. Further resources: Dart Center for Journalism and Trauma (dartcenter.org), Journalist Trauma Support Network, SAMHSA (samhsa.gov), Committee to Protect Journalists (cpj.org). November 2026.

Crisis Ready Media
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