



Psychological First Aid

An evidence-informed training to reduce stress and build resilience in communities after crisis

Frequently Asked Questions

Communities in Oklahoma are already experiencing increases in mental health needs due to COVID-19, with a recent Healthy Minds Policy Initiative (HMPI) [report](#) projecting higher rates of suicide, addiction and childhood trauma across the state in years to come. In an effort to prepare health care and social service workers for the increase in mental health concerns and to highlight the importance of May as Mental Health Month, the City of Tulsa's Mayor's Office of Resilience and Equity, Oklahoma State University Center for Health Sciences – Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences, the Tulsa City-County Health Department and HMPI are encouraging the community to take a free online Psychological First Aid training.

It takes a community to start to reverse the wide-reaching effects of this pandemic, and Tulsa would be one of many cities across the U.S., taking this type of action. Not only is Psychological First Aid beneficial for social services and frontline staff, but can also positively impact the general public's mental wellbeing at this crucial time.

As you browse below, you will find that information organized into the following categories:

What is Psychological First Aid (PFA)?

- Psychological First Aid (PFA) is an evidence-informed approach to help community members in the aftermath of a stressful or traumatic event. This resource addresses explicitly the situation(s) we currently face with COVID-19 and outlines how to apply the basic PFA standards when working with those most affected by the virus.¹
- PFA addresses basic needs and reduces psychological distress by providing a caring comforting presence, and education on common stress reactions. It empowers the individual by supporting strengths and encouraging existing coping skills. It also provides connections to natural support networks, and referrals to professional services when needed.²
- PFA is tool that each of us can use to reduce our stress level. By understanding your stress reactions and utilizing PFA principles, you can enhance resilience in yourself, your family, workplace and community.²
- PFA can help everyone—children, adolescents, adults, elders, families and communities who have been exposed to a traumatic or emergency incident, including responders and support service providers.²

Why Do I Need Psychological First Aid Training?

PFA equips social service and frontline health care staff with evidence-based approaches for addressing basic needs, helping reduce client and patient psychological stress while enhancing

individual and community resilience in the wake of COVID-19. Completing a PFA course is timely; the mental health consequences of the COVID-19 crisis are and will continue to be far-reaching. Taking PFA now prepares individuals for the increase of mental health needs to come. A recently released HMPI [report](#) highlights an important selection of some of the consequences the COVID-19 induced economic downturn will have on mental health and substance use trends.² It estimates that in the next 12 months:

- Hundreds of Oklahomans may die from behavioral health issues. We estimate 260 additional deaths from opioid overdoses and suicides alone due to economic hardship. If unemployment reaches as high as some experts project, this number could reach 700.²
- An increase in suicidal ideation and attempts. More than 34,000 additional Oklahomans may experience suicidal thoughts and more than 9,400 additional Oklahomans may attempt suicide. If unemployment reaches as high as some experts project, these numbers could be as high as 100,000 and 30,000, respectively.²
- Childhood mental health needs will increase substantially. For example, as many as 30% of children involved in quarantine may experience post-traumatic stress disorder.²
- Unemployment and financial stress will increase drug addiction and alcoholism. For example, more than 14,000 additional Oklahomans may develop a drug use disorder, and an additional 4,500 Oklahomans may develop alcohol use disorder.²

Where Can I Take Psychological First Aid Training?

- The American Psychological Association has the following free online resources for PFA training.⁴
 - National Child Traumatic Stress Network
 - [Psychological First Aid: Online course](#)
 - This six-hour course puts the participant in the role of provider in a post-disaster setting. The course is for individuals new to disaster response and want to learn the goals of PFA. Additional details about the course can be found on the website.
 - National Association of County & City Health Officials
 - [Public Health Preparedness — Building Workforce Resilience through the Practice of Psychological First Aid — A Course for Supervisors and Leaders](#)
 - This course is for those in a health, public health or emergency management role who may face responding to a disaster within one's organization.
 - John Hopkins Center for Public Health Preparedness
 - [Mental Health Preparedness — Psychological First Aid](#)
 - Online psychological first aid training.

References

- 1) Johnson, J. (May 13, 2020). Psychological First Aid during COVID-19. Oklahoma State University Center for Health Sciences Department of Psychiatry and Behavioral Sciences.
- 2) Carlson, N. (May 2020). Psychological First Aid (PFA). Minnesota Department of Health. <https://www.health.state.mn.us/communities/ep/behavioral/pfa.html>
- 3) Dittmer, T., and Zahniser, J. (April 23, 2020). *COVID-19 Projections and Effects on Mental Health in Oklahoma*. Healthy Minds Policy Initiative. <https://www.healthymindspolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/HMPI-COVID-Mental-Health-Projections-April-23-2020.pdf>
- 4) *Where Can You Get Training in Psychological First Aid?* (March 2019). American Psychological Association. <https://www.apa.org/practice/programs/dmhi/psychological-first-aid/training>