



Supporting children at times of crisis



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www.grievingstudents.org

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Psychological first aid



- Provide broadly to those impacted
- Supportive services to foster normative coping and accelerate natural healing process
- All staff should understand likely reactions and how to help children cope



- ***Anyone that interacts with children can be a potential source of assistance and support – if unprepared, they can be a source of further distress***

PFA Actions (source: American Red Cross)



- Observation or awareness
- Make a connection
- Help people feel comfortable and at ease
- Be kind, calm, & compassionate
- Assist with basic needs
- Listen
- Give realistic reassurance
- Encourage good coping
- Help people connect
- Give accurate and timely information
- Suggest a referral resource
- End the conversation

Basic needs are basic



- UWF (Brief Therapy)
- Need to deal with basic needs before able to address emotional needs
 - Safety, security
 - Food, shelter
 - Communication and reunification with family
- Staff have their own basic needs
 - Crisis plans need to address them as a priority



Potential symptoms of adjustment reactions

- Sleep problems
- Separation anxiety and school avoidance
- Anxiety and trauma-related fears
- Difficulties with concentration
- Deterioration in academic performance
- Regression
- Depression; Avoidance of previously enjoyed activities
- Substance abuse
- Somatization

Post-traumatic stress disorder



- Exposure to death, serious injury, or sexual violence
- Re-experiencing traumatic event
 - Recurrent, intrusive, distressing memories
 - Recurrent, distressing dreams
 - Dissociative reactions (e.g., flashbacks); post-traumatic play
- Avoidance of stimuli associated with trauma
- Negative alterations in cognitions and mood
- Increased arousal
 - Difficulty concentrating or sleeping
 - Irritability or anger
 - Self-destructive behavior
 - Hypervigilance or exaggerated startle

Range of reactions to crisis



- Wide range of reactions and concerns
 - Not just PTSD
- Bereavement
- Secondary losses and stressors
 - Relocation
 - Loss of peer network
 - Academic failure
 - New social network
 - Financial stresses
 - Parental stress, mental health problems
 - Marital conflict or domestic violence
- One crisis often awakens feelings related to pre-existing or past crisis



Cumulative loss



- Cumulative losses are neither protective nor desensitizing – children don't get “used to” death of peers
- Students may come to learn adults are unable to establish a safe environment and unprepared to provide assistance
- They may conclude there is little value in seeking such assistance and may appear to show no reactions after a death
- They may turn to peers for support or engage in risky behaviors because they are fearful of their own mortality

Parents often underestimate symptoms



- Children may withhold complaints because of concerns they are abnormal, or to protect parents who are upset
- Parents may not think professionals are interested or assume “normal reactions to abnormal event”
- Stigma related to mental illness



Adjustment Over Time in Crisis



A = baseline functioning

B = event

C = vulnerable state

D = usual coping mechanisms fail

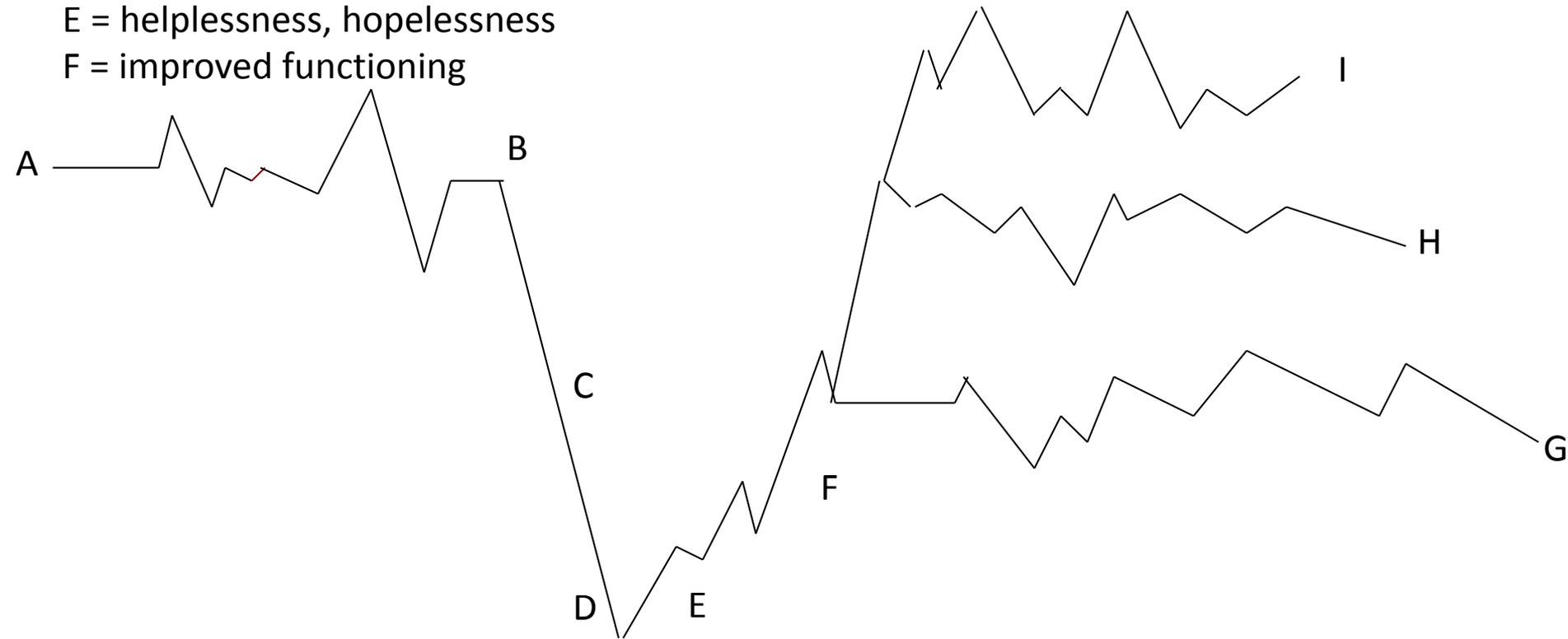
E = helplessness, hopelessness

F = improved functioning

G = continued impairment

H = return to baseline

I = post-traumatic growth





National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement

Initial Funding: September 11th Children's Fund & National Philanthropic Trust

Current support: New York Life Foundation

- Promote appreciation of role schools can serve to support students, staff, and families at times of crisis and loss
- Enhance training in professional education programs
- Serve as resource for information, training materials, consultation and technical assistance – provided at no charge to schools
- **www.schoolcrisiscenter.org**

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Website resources

National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement

www.schoolcrisiscenter.org

USC School
of Social Work
*National Center for School
Crisis and Bereavement*

Coalition to Support Grieving Students

www.grievingstudents.org



COALITION *to* SUPPORT
GRIEVING STUDENTS

AAP Children and Disasters – www.aap.org/disasters

– Coping and adjustment:

www.aap.org/disasters/adjustment

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For further information

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