

Why Stress First Aid for Nursing?

Nurses work in a pressurized context and the ramifications of this stress can negatively impact wellbeing. In many cases the pandemic has served to increase professional as well as personal stress levels. Continued staffing and resource shortages have compounded stress levels placing nurses in situations where doing the “right” thing is not possible leading to moral distress and compassion fatigue. Prolonged exposure to increased stress levels may result in both physical and psychological manifestations. Left unmanaged these increased stress levels may progress to stress injury and stress related illness.

What is Stress First Aid?

Stress First Aid (SFA) Peer Support is a set of supportive and practical actions for those in high-risk stress occupations. It aims to help team members identify and address early signs of stress reactions in themselves and others in an ongoing way (not just after “critical incidents”). Stress first aid provides a system-wide approach to responding to ongoing stress. Using a color-coded approach to understand the stress continuum, clinicians will learn to recognize symptoms in oneself, others, and the team to diagnose their state and to take action.

The Stress Continuum Model

The Stress Continuum Model is a visual tool for assessing your own and others’ stress responses. It views stress along a continuum with increasing severity. It acknowledges that every person will react when faced with severe enough or extended enough stress. How a person reacts is dependent on one’s own coping skills and resiliency and their preparation for and interpretation of the stressor event. Moving across the continuum, a person’s state can change from the **Green** to **Yellow** to **Orange** to **Red** zone, and back again. The approach provides a flexible multi-step process for the timely assessment and preclinical response to psychological injuries in individuals or units.

READY	REACTING	INJURED	ILL
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good to go • Well-trained • Prepared • Fit and focused • Cohesive units & ready families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Distress or impairment • Mild and transient • Anxious, irritable, or sad • Behavior change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More severe or persistent distress or impairment • Leaves lasting memories, reactions, and expectations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress injuries that don’t heal without help • Symptoms persist for many weeks, get worse, or initially get better and then return worse
Unit leader & Staff Responsibility	Individual, Colleague, Family Responsibility	Individual, Colleague, Family Responsibility	Caregiver Responsibility

Stress First Aid Model’s Core Actions

- SFA is based on a set of five evidence-based elements that have been linked to better functioning after stress and adversity across a number of settings. These elements are:
1. Regaining a sense of safety, or **cover**,
 2. Restoring **calm**, to reduce intense physiological arousal and negative emotions,
 3. Feeling **connected** to sources of social support,
 4. Increasing the sense of efficacy, which means feeling **competent** to handle the situations that create stress (on one’s own or as a team) or one’s own reactions to the stress, and
 5. Experiencing hope or **confidence** in one’s self and the world.



In addition to these 5 elements, SFA Model includes two additional actions, **Check** and **Coordinate**, which are considered continuous actions because they should be performed in an ongoing way to monitor stress so one can take measures to build resilience and intervene before a person or team is showing persistent **Orange** zone reactions. The other five SFA actions are used based on the check findings.

SFA Peer Outcomes:

- Increased resilience
- Enhanced work environments
- Enhanced team culture that improves engagement, retention, and meaningful work
- Improved peer and leader abilities to recognize stress injuries and respond with compassionate, restorative support

To learn more please join the upcoming Awareness Session on XXXX