PSYCHOSOCIAL SUPPORT

Towards safe and healthy living
Psychosocial support

Psychosocial response models

Model options:

- Critical Event
- Needs Assessment
- Stand-alone psychosocial programme
- Psychosocial plus: ‘Stand-alone’ psychosocial programme that includes other aspects e.g. basic needs, livelihood support
- Integrated model A: Psychosocial into other response e.g. Health services/disaster management
- Integrated model B: Psychosocial intervention as platform for other responses

Phased approach to psychosocial support

Emergency

Immediate response

Recovery – long term

Long term program design

ACTIVITY PLANNING

Regular review and adaptation according to findings of ongoing monitoring and evaluation

RECOVERY PHASES

Root shock

Realization

Acknowledgement

Adaptation

ACTIVITIES EXAMPLES

- Psychosocial First Aid
- Need and resource mapping
- Drama activities

- Support groups
- Home visits

- Youth club
- Drama activities
- Regular play groups with children
- Memorial activities

3 months

6 months

1 year

2 years

3 years

Critical Event

Source: PS Centre, 2009
Natural disasters and armed conflict can cause significant psychological and social suffering. The emotional wounds after a disaster or conflict may be less visible than the destruction of homes and physical infrastructure, but it often takes far longer to recover from psychological consequences and social disruption than to overcome material loss.

The purpose of psychosocial support is to build resilience – to increase the ability to absorb shock and bounce back – and to help people to cope with and recover from a disaster or critical event. The necessity of psychosocial preparedness and assistance was highlighted in 2011 with dramatic events, conflict and disasters in Japan, the Middle East, New Zealand and Norway. Thousands of Red Cross Red Crescent staff and volunteers provided support to the hundreds of thousands of people affected by these events.

The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) defines psychosocial support as a key component of a holistic health and resilience approach, as highlighted in Strategy 2020. The IFRC Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support was set up in 1993 and is hosted by the Danish Red Cross.

The centre promotes, guides and enhances psychosocial support initiatives carried out by National Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies globally. Its primary function as a ‘centre of excellence’ is to develop strategically important knowledge and best practice which will inform the IFRC’s future operations.

The reference centre works closely with the International Committee of the Red Cross to develop e-learning for delegates, staff and volunteers involved in the Restoring Family Links programmes. In addition, the centre developed the psychosocial component for the health Emergency Response Unit. This was deployed for the first time after the earthquake in Haiti in January 2010 and is constantly being improved and expanded.
Services provided by the PS Centre:
The reference centre provides technical support and capacity building, including training of trainers at country, regional and zone levels. Its key responsibilities include promoting knowledge sharing of psychosocial guidelines, strategies and programmes among National Societies. The centre counts on the assistance of the global psychosocial roster of trainers and experts, and supports the creation of regional networks.

Helping people affected by disasters, conflict and other dramatic events also takes its toll on staff and volunteers. The reference centre has therefore developed a number of tools to help train and support staff and volunteers exposed to death, destruction and tragedy.

The centre has recently produced a number of training packages and tools, including:
- a training kit for psychosocial support training courses
- a handbook on psychosocial interventions
- a volunteer toolkit for staff and volunteers in emergencies and
- a resilience programme for children.

Today many National Societies are involved in psychosocial support after dramatic events and in long-term social programmes (for example, with slum dwellers, victims of violence, children and the elderly), while others are beginning to build up their preparedness. We are becoming a key player in psychosocial support, drawing on expertise and experiences from the IFRC and counting on staff and volunteers living, working and staying in the affected communities.

The psychosocial programme in Haiti is an example of the successful impact this intervention can have if integrated in the early stages of emergency response programmes. The programme in Haiti began soon after the earthquake in 2010 and has reached to date more than 300,000 Haitians in distress: people living in displaced people’s camps in Port-au-Prince, those living in impoverished neighbourhoods, children orphaned or separated from their parents, patients in hospitals and cholera treatment centres, and victims of storms, landslides or floods.

The Haitian psychosocial programme has not only assisted many people but has also excelled in quality, innovation and motivation. The results now serve as an example for other National Societies and future disasters.
Case study
After Pakistan’s floods
Shakirulla is a 14-year-old student who attends a school in Swat District, Pakistan. His legs are disabled so he cannot walk and run like his classmates.

When the psychosocial support programme began after floods devastated the region in 2010, he was not interested in the activities. The volunteer running the programme made sure the other students included Shakirulla and he gradually became more involved and confident.

Later, he wrote his own story and it won a competition. He proudly read it out before the whole school: “One day I went swimming with my cousins. But just as they were getting ready, the army started [shooting] rounds of heavy fire. My friends all ran away and left me alone. I tried to escape but could not because of my disability. The bullets were everywhere and I was crying. I lost control until I took shelter behind a big stone. When the firing stopped I returned home without my shirt. My mother cried and hugged me, but my father was angry. He shouted and beat me asking, ‘Why did you go there?’ I could never forget that fear and thought about it all the time,” said Shakirulla. He then became involved in the psychosocial support programme run by Pakistan Red Crescent volunteers in the area where he lived. It helped him to get over the fear and helplessness he felt. “Now I have no fear and come to school and madrassa happily. I also help my father with the chores and now I do quite well playing games. My dream is to become a doctor to save human lives in the future,” he told his school.

Red Cross Red Crescent volunteers and staff across the globe provide important psychosocial support every day. Not only in response to disasters, armed conflict and tragic events, but also in social programmes for slum dwellers, victims of violence or accidents, elderly and isolated people, people stigmatized due to illness and prejudice, and refugees and asylum seekers.
Humanity The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, born of a desire to bring assistance without discrimination to the wounded on the battlefield, endeavours, in its international and national capacity, to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being. It promotes mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace amongst all peoples.

Impartiality It makes no discrimination as to nationality, race, religious beliefs, class or political opinions. It endeavours to relieve the suffering of individuals, being guided solely by their needs, and to give priority to the most urgent cases of distress.

Neutrality In order to enjoy the confidence of all, the Movement may not take sides in hostilities or engage at any time in controversies of a political, racial, religious or ideological nature.

Independence The Movement is independent. The National Societies, while auxiliaries in the humanitarian services of their governments and subject to the laws of their respective countries, must always maintain their autonomy so that they may be able at all times to act in accordance with the principles of the Movement.

Voluntary service It is a voluntary relief movement not prompted in any manner by desire for gain.

Unity There can be only one Red Cross or Red Crescent Society in any one country. It must be open to all. It must carry on its humanitarian work throughout its territory.

Universality The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, in which all societies have equal status and share equal responsibilities and duties in helping each other, is worldwide.