

Mental/Emotional Health First Aid

<https://www.beautifultrouble.org/training/for-trainers>

snapshot:

A brief overview for activists, organizers, and/or facilitators on how to approach and handle mental and emotional health challenges in a group or at an action.

time: 45 mins – 2 hours

energy level: *Medium*

materials: *Flipcharts, sticky notes, markers, and tape*

STEPS

1. **Brainstorm potential emotional and mental health stressors** that could happen specifically in training, meeting, or on site at an action (while recognizing that harm is always happening and is ongoing) such as:
 - Oppressive behavior or language.
 - A trauma response surfacing during a training or role play.
 - Emotional breakdown in response to personal or political news.
 - Violence.
2. **Discuss the [five components](#) of psychological first aid**, which are Safety, Calming, Self-efficacy, Connection, and Hope.
3. **Break into smaller groups to develop a list of potential responses** to the list generated in Step #1 and write them up on a chart. Because the responses will vary depending on context, be as specific as possible about the situation you are dealing with. Note down both the pros and cons of using these responses. Suggestions may include:
 - Have trained people assigned to [de-escalation](#) roles.
 - Identify safe(r) spaces or refuges for participants during street actions or meetings.
 - Meet basic needs such as food, water, and ventilation.
 - Set up a buddy system (or other support mechanisms).
 - Know where and when to access formal emergency medical services.
 - Have professionals on site if determined to be needed.
4. **Return to the big group to share learnings** by either doing a [Gallery Walk](#) from table to table or if possible, have the charts or sticky notes up on a wall and move them all close together to allow participants to view at once.
5. **Prioritize and select.** Use [DOTOCRACY](#) or simple discussion to identify the stressors and responses that are most likely to be an issue for your group in the near future.
6. If you have time, **set up role plays** to try out and practice your prioritized approaches from Step 5 above.

7. **Debrief** using the 3 F's: Feelings, Fact, Forward. **Share any learnings** from the role plays, identifying both the strengths and challenges that you may face, individually or as a group.
 - a. Talk about how it felt to be in these urgent situations
 - b. Acknowledge what you or your group have expertise or experience in handling, and where you need external support.
 - c. Identify future work to build capacity and get the training needed.

OPTIONS

- Use a video of a related situation to jump start the conversation.
- Allow for observers when running the role plays if someone is reluctant to take part.
- Have trained individuals available for support during sessions if distress is anticipated. Trained care providers can also be asked to present relevant information to the participants or answer questions.

TIPS

- If you are facilitating an intense role play, prepare in advance on how you will move folks into debrief. For example, take a deep breath altogether, transform the role play lines into a circle, or count backwards from 10.
- Learn how to articulate the limitations of the support you can offer. It's okay to direct someone to seek external help if their needs are beyond what you, as a facilitator, or the group can offer.

RESOURCES

- For a list of helplines in many countries around the world, see pages 99 - 101 of Amnesty International's well-being guide on [Staying Resilient While Trying to Save the World \(Volume 2\)](#).
- To navigate emergency services in your community (such as 911, 5150, 988, or dealing with community alternatives to the police) see pages 7 - 9 of the [Navigating a Mental Health Crisis](#) guide or [check out this list](#) on alternatives to police in responding to mental health.
- For more about Co-regulation see the BATMo! Activity on [Community Care Embodied Practice](#).
- For strategies on incorporating healing into direct actions see Black Lives Matter's toolkit on [Healing in Action](#).
- For do's, don'ts, and checklists on supporting someone in distress see this PDF: [Psychological First Aid Guide for field workers](#)

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