

Psychosocial Support in crisis situations will benefit from:

- use of pre-selected volunteers and good selection measures (interviews, questionnaires)
- the awareness and value of screening
- good assessment
- triage: what is needed by whom?
- an awareness that what is offered will have the impact that is required and intended
- the use of agreed standards and definitions
- evaluation according to expected outcome measures.

The challenges of delivering Psychosocial Support

- lack of acceptance within the teams
  - cumulative stress
  - helpers often being unable to recognise own needs
  - no common language for psychosocial support
  - diversity of the teams
  - helpers' culture expects them to cope with all
- lack of support and understanding by management
- lack of time assigned to programmes
- lack of availability of resources: trainers and supporters

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To learn more and get further information on Psychosocial Support



# Psychosocial Support

## What is Psychosocial Support?

**Psychosocial support** refers to activities that address both the psychological and social needs of individuals, families and communities.

Psychosocial support is an activity that improves the ability of an individual or community to function after, or through critical situations such as emergencies, disasters, social or health difficulties, by collaborating with individuals to:

- promote the use of their own and their community's resources
- help reduce emotional suffering so that individuals are better able to rely on their own and their community's resources
- enhance their recovery
- build resilience, their ability to cope.

**Psychosocial support programmes** are directed at community groups, rather than at individuals. Psychosocial support programmes are often the most efficient way to support the largest number of people. In this way, psychosocial support reinforces social networks, helps individuals learn how to protect themselves and others from further stress and engages individuals in their own recovery.

It should be emphasised that in most cases, where the natural processes of supporting family members, friends or communities are not disrupted and basic needs are being met in a humane manner, no major intervention is needed.

Psychosocial support in the Red Cross and Red Crescent context is sometimes delivered through programmes specifically designed to address psychosocial issues. However, it is more common that psychosocial support is integrated within other activities and programmes such as health programmes during emergency relief, assistance programmes to people living with HIV/AIDS or school support programmes.

## Guiding principles and characteristics of Psychosocial Support

- focus on reactions as normal reactions to abnormal situations
- an early intervention based on assessment; it emphasises early support for coping and adaptation processes. The activities may need to be sustained for some time in order to support recovery processes and may necessitate referring-on some strong reactions that appear only after some weeks
- culturally sensitive - which means respect for local culture, mental health or psychosocial healing practices
- promote the active participation of individuals and communities affected, as partners
- interventions avoiding stigmatising the affected population by offering activities to the whole population, and at the same time focussing on vulnerable groups and individuals who may need referral
- include all groups in the population, thereby avoiding creating divisions within community groups
- focus on sustainability and capacity building through local initiatives
- based on actual needs identified locally and not on needs perceived by the aid community
- should be achieved through shared community ownership
- encourage collaboration with Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies
- build sustainable Psychosocial Support Programmes based on local ownership and
- avoid creating aid-dependent structures.

## Remember

Psychosocial support can be integrated into all activities: First Aid, disaster preparedness and response, on-going conflict situations, emergency and community health such as HIV/AIDS/TB programmes, work with migrant and internally displaced populations.

Psychosocial support training should include basic social skills such as active listening, supporting stressed groups and individuals and also community-based activities.

The key to psychosocial support is the WAY in which an activity is undertaken:

- community-based intervention to re-establish a safe and calm environment
- community-based to improve community functioning
- by active, non-judgemental listening
- provision of practical information, such as the whereabouts of family members, access to social help
- achieved by programme development or training.

## Putting Psychosocial Support on the agenda

- lobbying
- awareness raising within the organisation is a priority
- good examples presented to management
- the organisation needs to be self aware and self supportive

### Starting a psychosocial support programme

- access external resources and expertise such as the IFRC Reference Centre for Psychosocial Support
- invite advisors from experienced Red Cross National Societies
- give priority to psychosocial support because it can solve problems
- communicate simple messages on psychosocial support
- take time and be patient.

### Developing a psychosocial support programme

- integrate psychosocial support programmes within the National Society
- expand peer support
- design programmes
- build the programme into the organisational and departmental structures
- use evidence and link interventions to research findings
- stay open to new developments.

### Evaluate the psychosocial support programme and measure the outcome

- agree appropriate outcome criteria
- use a range of methods such as questionnaires and focus groups
- select a baseline for comparison purposes
- check the process - what is done and how
- take care in interpreting findings
- have a strategy but stay flexible.