

Emotional First Aid (EFA) Skills



If you cut yourself, you put a bandage on it.
If your child is sick, you take her to the doctor.
If a co-worker gets hurt, you assist or call for help.



But what happens when we hurt emotionally or those we care about are hurting? What if the pain affects our personal lives, our ability to work, or the people around us?



People often ignore or even hide emotional pain. Sometimes it just goes away. But sometimes it gets worse and can lead to feelings of unmanageable stress, anger, depression, or even physical symptoms like headaches or back pain.



In the same way we train to provide first aid for physical injuries or illness, we can learn Emotional First Aid (EFA). EFA is a collection of skills that help us take better care of ourselves and the people around us. When we develop good EFA skills, work gets easier and life feels better.

Personal EFA Skills

EMOTIONAL FIRST AID

Loss. Change. Loneliness. Rejection. Failure. Heartbreak.

A psychological injury can hurt just as much as a physical one. Sometimes the pain lasts even longer. With Emotional First Aid (EFA) skills, you gain a better outlook on life and recover from challenges faster.



5 Daily EFA Skills to Practice

Don't wait for a crisis. Start now by practicing the following skills in your daily life.

- 1. Notice emotional pain.** If you recently experienced a personal issue or traumatic event, and you just can't get past it, you need to pay attention to that psychological injury. Ignoring pain won't make it go away. You might be feeling angry, sad, or frustrated, but a psychological injury can also cause physical symptoms. Pay attention to your pain. **How are you feeling right now?**
- 2. Be kind to yourself.** Negative self-talk like, "*I'm so stupid,*" and "*I do everything wrong,*" damages your self-esteem and resilience. Treat yourself with the same compassion you'd offer a friend or loved one. Next time you are feeling negative, substitute a hurtful thought with a positive one. **Take a few seconds to say or think something nice about yourself right now.**
- 3. Avoid rumination.** Repeatedly replaying distressing events in your mind is not a helpful way to heal wounds. To disrupt rumination, distract yourself by doing positive activities that require mental or physical attention. **If you catch yourself ruminating, label it as worrying and quickly move on.**
- 4. Redefine failure.** Avoid focusing on what you can't do instead of what you can do. When you experience a personal failure, make a list of what you'd control or change if you were to try again. **Tell yourself that next time, you'll do better, and then forgive yourself and go on.**
- 5. Find meaning in loss.** Find meaning in your loss by reframing your thinking about it. Consider what you've gained from the experience and what you could change to add more purpose to your life. **Try supporting others who have experienced a similar loss to lessen your own pain.**

Workplace EFA Skills

EMOTIONAL FIRST AID

People get hurt at work every day. While we spend time training to respond to physical injuries, many of us just don't know how to react when someone near us is emotionally hurting and needs help.

8 Tips for Helping Others with EFA

1. Be a positive listener. When someone is stuck in a rumination loop, they might just need a good listener to help them move on. Listen without judging, but try to pick up on cues of how they were hurt. *Do they feel embarrassed? Are they insulted?*

2. Encourage positive self-talk. Repeat key moments of their story, so they know you're listening, but leave out any negative self-talk they included.

3. Remind them to be kind. Ask how they'd feel if you were in their situation. *Would they think you're foolish? Would they expect you to feel ashamed?* Remind them to treat themselves the way they'd treat you or other co-workers or friends.

4. Help them reframe the situation. Ask what they would do differently next time. This can help them move past the incident by planning for the future.

5. Encourage resolution. If possible, suggest they talk about it with the other people involved. Most people don't want to hurt others, and they will likely modify their behaviors in the future.

6. Help them find closure. Recommend they write about what happened and then write how it could have gone better. Writing can help bring closure and break the over-thinking cycle.

7. Share mindfulness strategies you use. Go for a walk with them or suggest other mindful activities such as breathing exercises to help them refocus. Let them know what works for you.

8. Recommend counseling. If they just seem stuck and unopen to your feedback, recommend EAP counseling. Counseling can help people recover from psychological wounds fast. It's free and confidential.



We All React Differently

Severe emotional events affect almost everyone. But sometimes, less severe experiences can also damage people.

Being yelled at by a supervisor. Being blamed for something. Fighting with a co-worker. Feeling misunderstood. Facing unexpected changes.

These situations can hurt. Some of us recover on our own, but without emotional first aid (EFA), the pain can grow into lingering wounds.

We all respond to personal experiences in different ways at different times. One person might be feeling more sensitive than usual because of problems at home. Another may simply lack personal resilience skills.

What might seem like a small incident to you, could feel like the world is crashing down on a co-worker.

Without EFA skills, people often ruminate, replaying incidents in their heads or talking about them with co-workers or family members. Rumination doesn't resolve pain, so people get stuck and develop psychological wounds.

Rumination can lead to personal problems, including depression or substance abuse. Being around people who spend time ruminating can also damage you.

You can use your EFA skills to help others avoid psychological wounds while you help protect yourself from negativity at work.

10 Emergency EFA Skills to Help Yourself

1. Take five slow, deep breaths.
2. Remind yourself that this, too, shall pass.
3. Accept all of your feelings.
4. Have faith in you. You can handle more than you might believe at this moment. Use meditation or prayer for added support.
5. Don't take anything personally.
6. Try to stick with your routine, even if you feel dazed or numb. It will help anchor you.
7. Eat, sleep, or get some fresh air.
8. Picture your 6-year-old self, and lovingly embrace that child. Gently reassure the frightened self inside you.
9. Understand you are here, in this life, for everything, good and bad. Visualize yourself as a river of experiences, and let life flow without judgment.
10. Connect with someone. Talk to a friend, family member, or EAP counselor.
Helping a co-worker might also help you feel better. Source: goodtherapy.org

Traumatic events can happen anywhere, including at work. They might include an accident, an act of violence, or a natural disaster. If something like this happens at your workplace, take care of yourself. Once you know you're okay, try to help others who might be suffering from emotional shock.

5 Tips for Helping Someone Who Has Just Been Traumatized

1. Help with any bodily injuries, medical issues, or **physical needs first**.
2. Go to a **safe place** if possible.
3. **Stay with them**. Don't get up and act like nothing happened. Help them stay dry, warm, and still. Trembling or being emotional is part of healing, and better than 'numbing out.'
4. If the person wants to talk, **listen without interrupting** or changing the subject.
5. Encourage them to **reconnect with their body** and feel the sensations in their body fully.

Trauma cuts us off from our bodies. When we are in overwhelming danger, we dissociate or *leave our bodies*. This is helpful to us during a traumatic event, but we need to reconnect after, so we don't get stuck in trauma.

You can help someone in emotional shock by asking permission to hold their hand or squeeze their shoulder.

If they are uncomfortable being touched, ask them to describe the color of the room or the shirt you are wearing. You could also give them something to hold, like a coin or scarf, and talk about how it feels.

Ask them to tell you about a favorite place, where they feel safe or happy. Have them describe how they feel when they are in that place, including the smells, sounds, and colors.

Source: https://www.ncmhr.org/downloads/trauma_first_aid_fact_sheet12-08.pdf



Planning EFA Kits

You probably have a first aid kit at home with bandages, alcohol pads, and other important tools. Maybe you even have an emergency or evacuation kit filled with extra supplies in case of a natural disaster.

You can also prepare to survive and recover from psychological wounds faster by creating Emotional First Aid (EFA) kits. Choose some tools to include in your EFA kits for home, work, or on the go.



Tools for My EFA Kits

	Home EFA Kit	Work EFA Kit	Mobile EFA Kit
A list of times in my life I thought I'd never get through (but I survived).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A ticket for a future event that I'm looking forward to (concert, sports, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lotion, essential oil, or any type of calming scent.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A comfort item or photo from my childhood.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A few letters, cards, or texts from people I love.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A favorite book or inspirational audio book.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A blank journal and pen.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A playlist of songs that make me feel good.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A meaningful religious or spiritual item (beads, mantra, poem).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A packet of my favorite tea or candy.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A fidget toy, gadget, or app to occupy my mind.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A warm sweater or hoodie that makes me feel safe.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A daily planner where I list fun things I want to do, not just what I must do.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Actions to Heal Myself

Identify some activities to help you recover faster when you experience psychological wounds.

- Volunteer for something that matters to me.
- Spend time in nature (walk, hike, fish, read).
- Reach out to a trusted friend to talk.
- Try a hobby that takes focus (painting, archery, yoga).
- Schedule happy activities now and in the future.
- Visit an elderly relative, friend, or neighbor.
- Practice meditation and learn to breath.
- Make time for seeing loved ones in person.
- Play with a pet or child.
- Splurge on a treat (massage, golf lesson, weekend getaway).
- Keep a daily gratitude journal.
- Visit a counselor (EAP counseling is a free luxury).

Use the EAP

Have you ever stood by a river or stream, just listening to the rippling water passing by? How about the waves of the ocean? *How does it feel?*

Hearing and watching the sounds and motion of water makes most people feel good.

Wouldn't it be great to feel that calm and that connected to the moment more of the time? Short-term counseling can help you build simple skills to manage stress, focus on priorities, sleep better, and feel more balanced at work and at home.

You don't have to face a specific or urgent problem to benefit from counseling. If you'd just like to feel more at ease, like you feel when you imagine standing on the banks of a slow flowing river, then reach out and start making your life more peaceful today.

Along with **local, in-person counseling**, your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) offers a variety of free, confidential services to help you start living easier.

24-hour crisis line

Online legal documents

Home ownership support

Legal and financial services

Personal mediation services

Child and eldercare resources

Personal improvement trainings

Online health and wellness resources

Online newsletters and monthly webinars



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