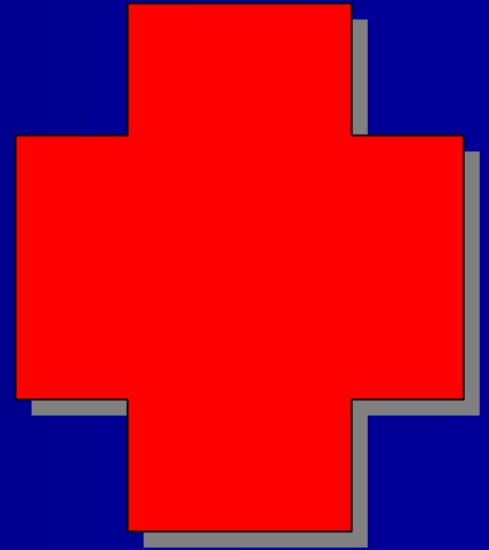


# Psychological First Aid

Don Sheldrew  
Behavioral Health Preparedness Planner  
MN Department of Health

May 18, 2006



# What is a Disaster?

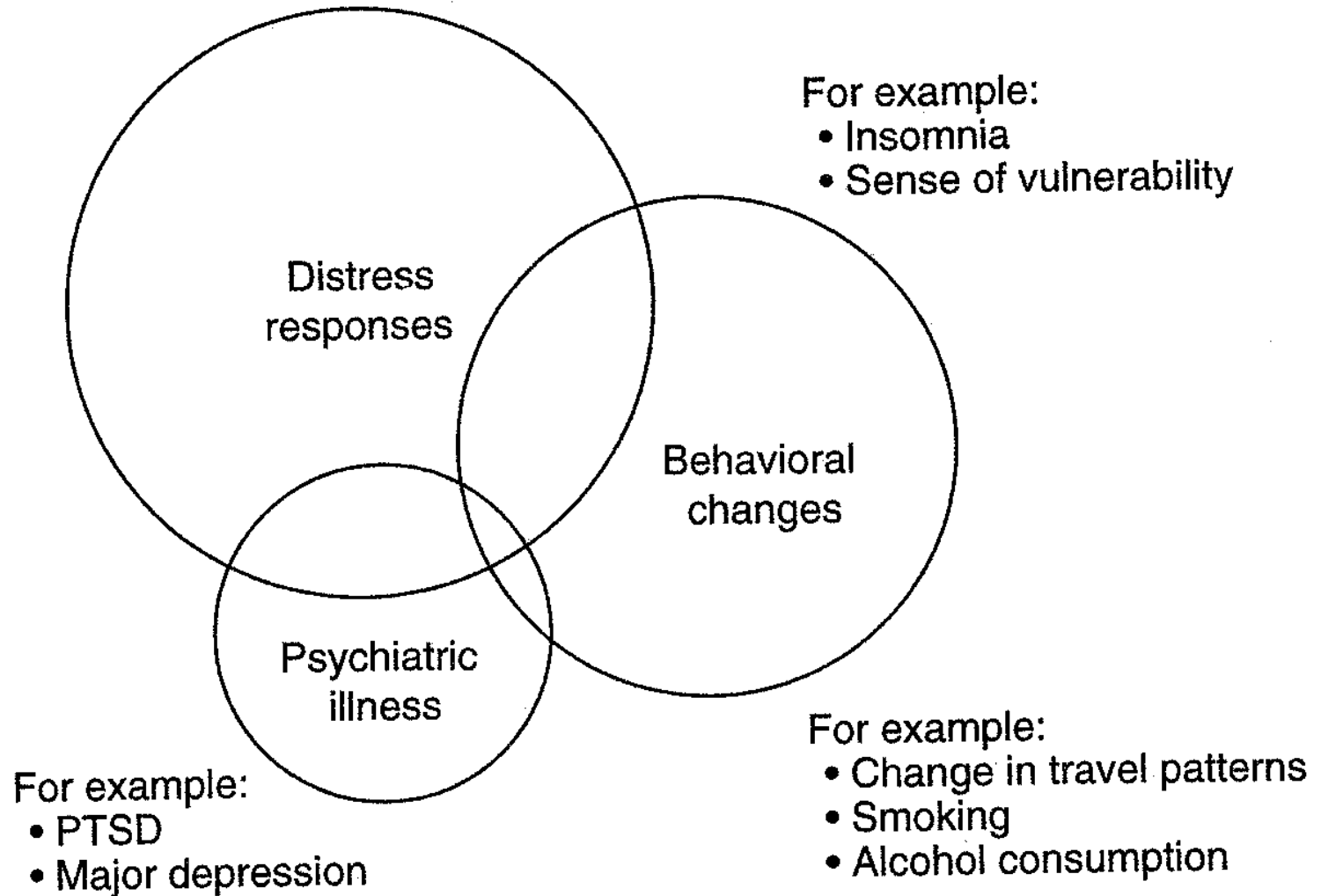
- A disaster is an occurrence such as a hurricane, tornado, storm, flood, high water, wind-driven water, tidal wave, earthquake, drought, blizzard, pestilence, famine, fire, explosion, volcanic eruption, building collapse, transportation wreck, or other situation that causes human suffering or creates human needs that the victim cannot alleviate without assistance.

# Stress/ Distress

- .... anything we consider challenging causes stress, even if it is something we willingly choose to do. The key is that stress requires us to adjust our attention and behavior and makes demands upon our energy.

# Psychological Consequences of Disasters and Terrorism

(R. Ursano, 2002)

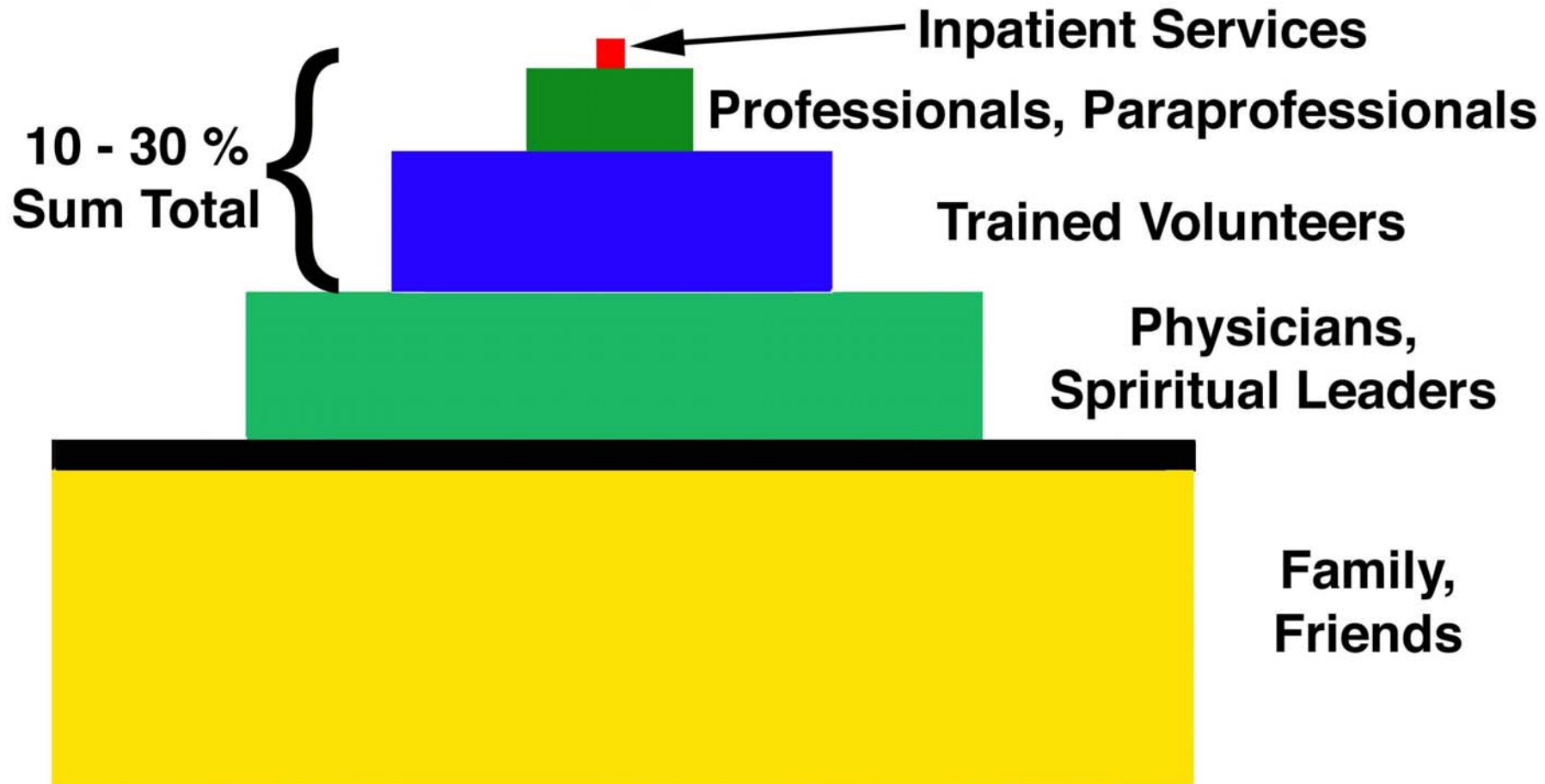


**These can apply to responders, not just victims.**

# What is Crisis Intervention?

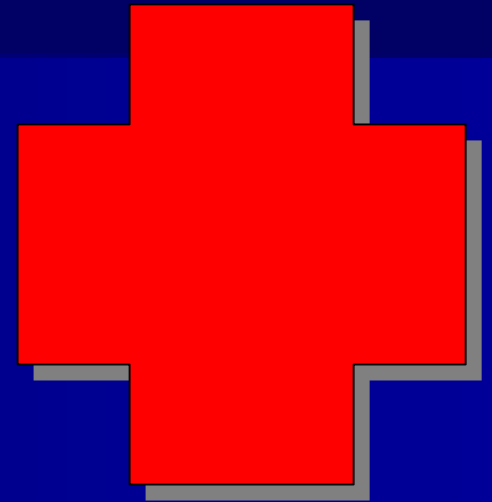
- Designed to Help the Survivor:
  - absorb what happened
  - understand what happened
  - decide what to do next
- Objectives:
  - Pain relief, problem solving, coping skills
  - Resources, functioning, and assistance

# Revised Reigel Model of Reactions to Traumatic Stress



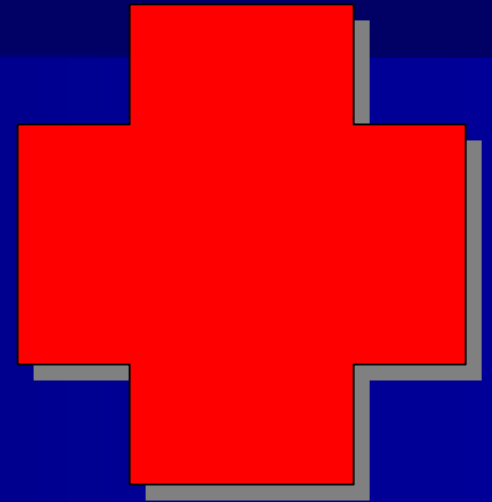
# Psychological First Aid

- PFA is a set of knowledge and skills for providing basic psychological support to friends, family, and neighbors in your community who have experienced a stressful event.
- PFA uses skills you probably already have and may help you to use them in a more effective manner.



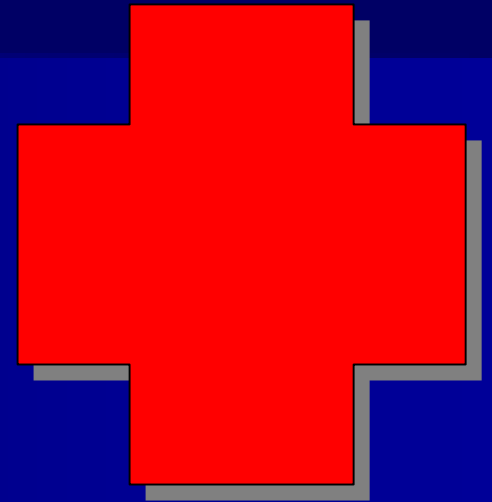
# Psychological First Aid

- Uses volunteers familiar with the customs, values, needs of those being served.
  - Cultural sensitivity and awareness
  - Less alienation in minority populations
- Preparing reduces stress reactions



# Psychological First Aid

- Community-based model with clear continuum of care, line of authority and supervision
- Mental Health Professionals serve as design consultants, master trainers, supervisors of paraprofessionals, bridges to the higher continuum of care



# What People Need

- Most often, people especially need someone to talk to about their experience
- Someone to care
- Someone to really listen
- Someone to lean on or cry with
- Someone to be present with them

# PFA Response Model

(adapted from the Miami DEEP Hospital PFA Model)



# INTERVENTION GOAL:

- To promote an environment of safety, calmness, connectedness, empowerment, and hope.



# Promote Safety

- Help people meet their basic needs for food and shelter
- Obtain emergency medical attention
- Provide repeated simple, and accurate information on how to meet their basic needs.

## Make a referral when:

- Unpleasant symptoms last more than four to six weeks despite good PFA support.\*
- It continues to be difficult for person to function effectively on the job, or at home, or at school despite good PFA support.
- An individual feels concerned about his/her behaviors or emotions.
- Evidence of potential for violence to self or others, or psychotic processes.
- **If you feel at all uncomfortable!**

# Promote Calm

- Listen to people who wish to share their stories and emotions.
- Be friendly and compassionate even if people are being difficult.
- Offer accurate information about the disaster or trauma, and help survivors to understand the situation.

# Supportive Communication

- Supportive communication conveys:
  - Empathy
  - Concern
  - Respect
  - Confidence



# Faith Leaders Responding to Survivors

- Listen
- Express Compassion
- Don't explain or argue
- No platitudes
- Hear their beliefs
- Listen to the anger
- Affirm their search for answers



# Promote Connectedness

- Help people connect friends and loved ones.
- Keep families together.
- Keep children with parents or other close relatives whenever possible.

- Find out the types of locations of government and non-government services and direct people to those services that are available.
- When they express fear or worry, remind people (if you know) that more help and services are on the way.

# Faith Community Role in Crisis

- Space
  - building for meetings, shelter
- Resources to Support the Response
  - Food, skills, spiritual contacts
- Religious Services
  - Healing, memorial, safety
- Compassionate Presence



# Promote Empowerment

- Assist in defining concrete tasks.
- Give practical suggestions that steer people towards helping themselves.
- Engage people in meeting their own needs.
- Allow people the opportunity to help others.

# What Survivors Want to Say to Faith Leaders

- Don't explain
- Don't take away my reality
- Help me with forgiveness & integrity
- Stay close
- Remember me for a long time
- Don't be frightened by my anger
- Listen to my doubt
- Be patient



# Promote Hope

By Providing:

- Safety
- Calm
- Connections
- Empowerment

