

MHPSS Evidence Snapshot

Psychological First Aid: from children to children

Psychological First Aid (PFA) has spread as a popular approach to crisis intervention. Among the various models, one of the simplest is that used by the **International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)**, which defines PFA as a *method of helping people in distress, so they feel calm and supported in coping with their challenges*, and consists of three principles: **Look, Listen, and Link**.

To promote the learning of PFA among children so that they can use them among peers.

However, at present, there is still an imbalance between the popularity of PFA and the scant evidence of its results. Furthermore, no examples have been identified of initiatives aimed to *promote the learning of PFA among children so that they can use them among peers*.



Class of 4th D at Joaquim Nicolau de Almeida School, in a PFA exercise. Photo credit: Portuguese Red Cross, Vila Nova de Gaia Branch.

Background

In response to a need identified by a school district to improve relations between students, especially in situations of stress and crisis, the **Portuguese Red Cross** designed and implemented a program to promote the learning of PFA among children so that they can use them among peers. The program was based on the IFRC model of PFA: Look, Listen and Link, along with concepts from social psychology.

How the research was conducted

A group of 194 4th graders, between the ages of 8 and 10, were assessed *before* and *after* their participation in the program. Data was collected on their capacity for *empathy* and *subjective health and well-being*, as well as their *skills in applying PFA*.

Key findings

Children's participation in this program was associated with the following results:

- **Learning the skills to apply PFA with peers.**
- **Increased capacity for empathy.**
- **Better health and subjective well-being.**

Implications for humanitarian practitioners and policymakers

The promising results of this study on PFA learning in children reveal the following:

- It is possible for young children between the ages of 8 and 10 to learn PFA.
- Children can use PFA among peers.
- The capacity for empathy and well-being appears to increase when children learn to use PFA to support their peers.
- Children can learn PFA in a school context, as a preventative measure or for use after a crisis or disaster, contributing to the recovery of their peers.
- Humanitarian programmers can engage children to provide peer support as part of their response to emergencies.

Recommendations for future research

In the future, it will be important to develop an experimental design to evaluate the program, as well as replicate it with children of different age groups and include greater involvement from the school community (e.g., teachers, staff, and parents).

About the study team

The program was designed and implemented by the Portuguese Red Cross, in collaboration with the Catholic University of Porto and the Soares dos Reis School District, Vila Nova de Gaia, Portugal.

The study was carried out in the 2021/2022 school year.

The main researchers: Randdy Ferreira, Marina Moreira and Inês Ribeiro (Portuguese Red Cross) and Mariana Barbosa (Catholic University of Porto).

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Articles and further reading

Moreira, M., Ferreira, R., Lima, I., Pintado, M., & Braga, A. (2022, setembro). *Primeiros Socorros Psicológicos para Heróis (PSP-H): um programa para crianças utilizarem os PSP entre Pares*. Paper presented at the 5th Congress of the Portuguese Psychologists' Association, Aveiro.

Book of abstracts:

https://www.ordemdospsicologos.pt/ficheiros/documentos/supplement_2022_abstracts.pdf

(In Portuguese language)