

## **Election Stress and Discriminatory Rhetoric: Responding with Psychological First Aid (PFA)**

Many communities who have experienced forced displacement may have increased stress, anxiety, safety concerns, and heightened distress around elections due to several factors including but not limited to:

- **Bigoted and inflammatory political rhetoric** – National elections are often a time of heightened political rhetoric that increases as the election date approaches. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for this rhetoric to be explicitly or implicitly bigoted. Frequently targeted groups (currently and historically) include immigrants, people of color, people who identify as LGBTQIA+, and people of Muslim and Jewish faith. This rhetoric can also be accompanied by a rise in hate crimes and hate incidences.
- **Past experiences with election-related violence** – Forcibly displaced people are more likely to have past experience of election related violence like assassinations, coups, targeted violence while attempting to vote, government repression, targeted retaliation for political activities (threats, jail, torture, etc.) and violence in response to election-related protests.
- **Witnessing protests, civil disruptions or other election related activities** – There is often heightened protests and civil disruption during an election season. People can also see images on the news of protests, threats, and violence related to the election.

Psychological First Aid (PFA) is an evidence-informed communication intervention for helping people cope in the immediate aftermath of a traumatic event, disaster or crisis. The communication skills in PFA can also be useful in supporting individuals in distress, including election-related distress. A simplified version of PFA consists of four types of actions, Prepare, Engage, Listen and Link, which can be applied to all crisis/disaster situations. On the next pages, you will find recommendations for applying Psychological First Aid (PFA) to support clients who are seeking help with managing stress, anxiety, and fear related to their experiences during this election cycle.

# Psychological First Aid (PFA) for Election Stress and Discriminatory Rhetoric

## Prepare

Be prepared with information that clients may need, including information on staying safe, knowing rights, and understanding elections. Below are resources to explore.

[How presidential elections work](#) in the United States, including steps and processes.

Rights for individuals who are not U.S. citizens and what they can do if they feel their rights have been violated:

- The [Immigrant Legal Resource Center](#) (ILRC) has created [Red Cards](#), which help people assert their rights and defend themselves in many situations, such as when ICE agents go to a home. Cards are available at the ILRC website in Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Haitian, Hmong, Korean, Punjabi, Russian, Tagalong, Tigrinya, Ukrainian and Vietnamese. ILRC also offers a [guide for using red cards](#) in your organization, and an illustrated, [multilingual guide](#) for how clients can use red cards.
- The [American Civil Liberties Union](#) (ACLU) has created [Know Your Rights Resources](#) for immigrants – these are available in Arabic, Chinese, Creole, Farsi, French, Indonesian, Korean, Portuguese, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, Urdu, Vietnamese, Hindi, Traditional Chinese, and Simplified Chinese.
- The [Immigrant Defense Project](#) has created [Know Your Rights with ICE](#) in English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Tagalog, Haitian Creole, Hindi, Bangla, Punjabi, Arabic, Urdu, Simplified and Traditional Mandarin, Korean, Russian, and Hebrew.

Information about support and safety in the event of hate incidents:

- [Staying Safe Against Hate](#) is a client-facing handout from CARRE with information on what hate crimes and hate incidents are, how to remain safe, and reporting options. It is available in [Arabic](#), [Dari](#), [French](#), [Pashto](#), [Spanish](#), [Congolese Swahili](#), and [Somali](#).
- [Supporting Children and Youth Affected by Hate Incidents and Hate Crimes](#) is CARRE's client-centered handout for parents who may have a child impacted by a hate incident or hate crime. It is available in [Arabic](#), [Dari](#), [French](#), [Pashto](#), [Spanish](#), [Congolese Swahili](#), and [Somali](#).

**Local Referrals and Supports** – Know what local supports may be available in the community and how to refer clients. This includes mental health, ethnic community-based organizations, faith-based institutions, legal resources and more.

## Engage

**Plan for how you will engage with clients depending upon your role and relationship with them.** Some positions like therapists may proactively enquire about this issue while most positions are encouraged to reactively respond to clients who are demonstrating distress. Either way, you will want to be prepared for a wide range of responses and emotions and ready to respond with empathy. When responding, it is important to validate emotions while also not feeding into hypothetical fears, for example:

- *It makes a lot of sense that these weeks leading up to the elections are stressful for you as part of the immigrant community. With so many unknowns, we don't know how or*

*whether the elections will impact you. We do know that the election is November 5<sup>th</sup> and the new President will be in office on January 20<sup>th</sup>. We're preparing for either result and we'll be ready to provide more specific support when we know who is elected.*

As needed, ask questions that are non-intrusive, compassionate, and helpful in identifying needs and concerns so that you can provide the right information or refer people to the right supports. In conversation, do NOT share additional stories or rumors as sharing them may increase distress. Examples of helpful questions can be:

- *Can you tell me what worries you the most?*
- *What specific questions do you have?*
- *What information do you feel you need?*

## Listen

**Utilize active listening skills to calm and orient people who may be overwhelmed or fearful.** Provide space and time for them to be able to express their emotions without jumping to problem solving. Validate concerns and normalize the range of emotions clients may be feeling. Examples of what you can say:

- *I think a lot of people are feeling the same way right now.*
- *That sounds like a normal response.*
- *This is upsetting! I'm sorry the language surrounding immigrants and newcomers is so hurtful and untrue.*

Pay attention to immediate and ongoing safety issues, including if the person is not able to function currently. Consider safety planning around client concerns such as planned or unplanned interactions with protests and demonstrations, fear of police, and worries about discrimination and/or harassment.

## Link

**Provide ways that people can get accurate information** (see prepare section).

**Help clients identify coping skills and/or strategies** to reduce distress and promote adaptive functioning.

- *Who do you go to that supports you?*
- *Who can you talk to when you are worried or upset?*
- *What have you done in the past that has been helpful?*
- *Who in your community can you get reliable information and support from?*

**Encourage clients to use coping skills** and seek support from family, friends, and community groups. For example, clients can:

- Utilize personal coping skills that help distract from and disrupt anxious thoughts, or activities and environments that provide a sense of calm and safety,
- Limit media and social media exposure to violence or other distressing content,
- Combat feelings of helplessness by supporting others and reaching out to community groups and coalitions.