



Helping Others Cope in Times of Tragedy

Profound sadness, grief and anger are normal reactions to an abnormal event. While we each have different needs and different ways of coping, many find it helpful to talk with someone about their feelings. Here are some tips:

- **Acknowledge the loss in some way.** Send a card. Help to plan a memorial service. Observe a moment of silence at a community event.
- **Listen.** An affected person needs a listener who is accepting and supportive and willing to listen patiently to often repetitive stories. The need to "tell the story" decreases as healing progresses. And each time the story is told, the finality of the event(s) sinks in a little more. When feelings of anger, frustration, disappointment, fear, and sadness are expressed, accept those feelings. If the person keeps them bottled inside, they will slow the healing process. Sharing thoughts and feelings lessens the stress and avoids health problems over time
- **Don't try to lessen the loss with easy answers.** Trying to make sense of a tragedy by saying something like, "Things always work out for the best," are remarks that are seldom helpful. It's more important for the affected person to feel your presence than to hear anything you might say. Remember, there are no ready phrases which will take away feelings of loss, anger, and sadness. Avoid debating how a person feels or telling him/her "Don't feel that way."
- **Don't feel that you must have "something to say."** Your presence is enough. Especially with fresh grief, your embrace, your touch, and your sincere sorrow are all the affected person may need. Contact the person, no matter how much time has passed since the event. The person still appreciates knowing you care.
- **Take the initiative.** Don't merely say, "If there's anything I can do, give me a call." Make suggestions and specific offers of help. Each thoughtful gesture gives something of yourself and keeps the affected person from having to continually reach out for assistance. It also lets the person know you think he or she is important. An offer to spend an evening just watching television together can be very comforting.

CAPITAL AREA HUMAN SERVICES

4615 Government Street, Building 2 | Baton Rouge, LA 70806 | (225) 925-1906 | www.cahsd.org | www.realhelpbr.com



Tips for Responding to Children After a Tragedy

- Give children a constructive example to believe in and follow. Children are extremely sensitive to your actions as well as your words. They will notice your body language, tone of voice, and even how gentle or rough your touch is.
- In word and deed, reassure children they're not forgotten in the mayhem. Let your actions convince them that their safety and security are your top priority.
- Limit children's exposure to graphic details of crisis and to the news media's coverage. Children often personalize information. They believe crisis will affect their immediate family, even if it's actually happening miles away. Whenever possible, reassure children they are safe and far from the crisis. However, if you are directly involved with the crisis, be honest and specific about actions you will take to protect them.
- Respond to children's questions calmly in language geared to your child's age and understanding. Giving too little information can confuse children. On the other hand, giving them too much information can overwhelm them.
- If your family has children with a wide age span, speak to teens separately from younger children. Be open and honest with teens and give them plenty of room to express anger and disbelief. Caution the teens to avoid making angry or graphic responses in front of younger siblings.
- Separate your feelings from your child's. If you become overwhelmed by crisis, find others to whom you can safely express anxiety, such as family, friends, neighbors, or a counselor. By getting help for yourself, you'll be better able to support your children.

Symptoms of Children Over-Stressed by Crisis

During times of unrelenting stress, children may experience changes in behavior or attitude. If such signs don't reduce over time, or in fact increase, consider taking children for counseling to help them make sense of reality. Symptoms calling for skilled help include: changes in sleep patterns, appetite, or energy level; bedwetting; regression in toilet training; regression to thumb sucking; uncharacteristic separation problems from parents; excessive whining and irritability; long-term poor concentration; unusual, persistent aggression; and apathy, isolation, and depression.

If you or a loved one needs help coping with tragedy, please contact Capital Area Human Services:

Adults 225-925-1906

Children 225-922-0445

www.realhelpbr.com

Louisiana Office of Behavioral Health 24-hour Crisis Counselor 866-310-7977

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