

# Appendix E: Handouts

## CONNECTING WITH OTHERS

### GIVING SOCIAL SUPPORT

You can help family members and friends cope with the disaster by spending time with them and listening carefully. Most people recover better when they feel connected to others who care about them. Some people choose not to talk about their experiences very much, and others may need to discuss their experiences. For some, talking about things that happened because of the disaster can help them seem less overwhelming. For others, just spending time with people one feels close to and accepted by, without having to talk, can feel best. Here is some information about giving social support to other people.

#### Reasons Why People May Avoid Social Support

- Not knowing what they need
- Feeling embarrassed or “weak”
- Feeling they will lose control
- Not wanting to burden others
- Doubting it will be helpful, or that others won’t understand
- Having tried to get help and felt that it wasn’t there before
- Wanting to avoid thinking or feeling about the event
- Feeling that others will be disappointed or judgmental
- Not knowing where to get help

#### Good Things to Do When Giving Support

- Show interest, attention, and care
- Find an uninterrupted time and place to talk
- Be free of expectations or judgments
- Show respect for individuals’ reactions and ways of coping
- Acknowledge that this type of stress can take time to resolve
- Help brainstorm positive ways to deal with their reactions
- Talk about expectable reactions to disasters, and healthy coping
- Believe that the person is capable of recovery
- Offer to talk or spend time together as many times as is needed

#### Things That Interfere with Giving Support

- Rushing to tell someone that he/she will be okay or that they should just “get over it”
- Discussing your own personal experiences without listening to the other person’s story
- Stopping the person from talking about what is bothering them
- Acting like someone is weak or exaggerating because he or she isn’t coping as well as you are
- Giving advice without listening to the person’s concerns or asking the person what works for him or her
- Telling them they were lucky it wasn’t worse

#### When Your Support is Not Enough

- Let the person know that experts think that avoidance and withdrawal are likely to increase distress, and social support helps recovery
- Encourage the person to get involved in a support group with others who have similar experiences
- Encourage the person to talk with a counselor, clergy, or medical professional, and offer to accompany them
- Enlist help from others in your social circle so that you all take part in supporting the person

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### SEEKING SOCIAL SUPPORT

- Making contact with others can help reduce feelings of distress
- Children and adolescents can benefit from spending some time with other similar-age peers
- Connections can be with family, friends, or others who are coping with the same traumatic event

#### Social Support Options

- |                         |                                       |                 |
|-------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------|
| • Spouse or partner     | • Priest, Rabbi, or other clergy      | • Support group |
| • Trusted family member | • Doctor or nurse                     | • Co-worker     |
| • Close friend          | • Crisis counselor or other counselor | • Pet           |

#### Do . . .

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| • Decide carefully whom to talk to              | • Start by talking about practical things                    | • Ask others if it's a good time to talk  |
| • Decide ahead of time what you want to discuss | • Let others know you need to talk or just to be with them   | • Tell others you appreciate them listening   |
| • Choose the right time and place               | • Talk about painful thoughts and feelings when you're ready | • Tell others what you need or how they could help—one main thing that would help you right now |

#### Don't . . .

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| • Keep quiet because you don't want to upset others      | • Assume that others don't want to listen   |
| • Keep quiet because you're worried about being a burden | • Wait until you're so stressed or exhausted that you can't fully benefit from help |

#### Ways to Get Connected

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| • Calling friends or family on the phone  | • Getting involved with a support group             |
| • Increasing contact with existing acquaintances and friends                                  | • Getting involved in community recovery activities |
| • Renewing or beginning involvement in church, synagogue, or other religious group activities |   |

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## WHEN TERRIBLE THINGS HAPPEN WHAT YOU MAY EXPERIENCE

### Immediate Reactions

There are a wide variety of positive and negative reactions that survivors can experience during and immediately after a disaster. These include:

Domain	Negative Responses	Positive Responses
Cognitive	Confusion, disorientation, worry, intrusive thoughts and images, self-blame	Determination and resolve, sharper perception, courage, optimism, faith
Emotional	Shock, sorrow, grief, sadness, fear, anger, numb, irritability, guilt and shame	Feeling involved, challenged, mobilized
Social	Extreme withdrawal, interpersonal conflict	Social connectedness, altruistic helping behaviors
Physiological	Fatigue, headache, muscle tension, stomachache, increased heart rate, exaggerated startle response, difficulties sleeping	Alertness, readiness to respond, increased energy

### Common negative reactions that may continue include:

#### Intrusive reactions

- Distressing thoughts or images of the event while awake or dreaming
- Upsetting emotional or physical reactions to reminders of the experience
- Feeling like the experience is happening all over again (“flashback”)

#### Avoidance and withdrawal reactions

- Avoid talking, thinking, and having feelings about the traumatic event
- Avoid reminders of the event (places and people connected to what happened)
- Restricted emotions; feeling numb
- Feelings of detachment and estrangement from others; social withdrawal
- Loss of interest in usually pleasurable activities

#### Physical arousal reactions

- Constantly being "on the lookout" for danger, startling easily, or being jumpy
- Irritability or outbursts of anger, feeling "on edge"
- Difficulty falling or staying asleep, problems concentrating or paying attention

#### Reactions to trauma and loss reminders

- Reactions to places, people, sights, sounds, smells, and feelings that are reminders of the disaster
- Reminders can bring on distressing mental images, thoughts, and emotional/physical reactions
- Common examples include: sudden loud noises, sirens, locations where the disaster occurred, seeing people with disabilities, funerals, anniversaries of the disaster, and television/radio news about the disaster

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## Positive changes in priorities, worldview, and expectations

- Enhanced appreciation that family and friends are precious and important
- Meeting the challenge of addressing difficulties (by taking positive action steps, changing the focus of thoughts, using humor, acceptance)
- Shifting expectations about what to expect from day to day and about what is considered a “good day”
- Shifting priorities to focus more on quality time with family or friends
- Increased commitment to self, family, friends, and spiritual/religious faith

## When a Loved One Dies, Common Reactions Include:

- Feeling confused, numb, disbelief, bewildered, or lost
- Feeling angry at the person who died or at people considered responsible for the death
- Strong physical reactions such as nausea, fatigue, shakiness, and muscle weakness
- Feeling guilty for still being alive
- Intense emotions such as extreme sadness, anger, or fear
- Increased risk for physical illness and injury
- Decreased productivity or difficulties making decisions
- Having thoughts about the person who died, even when you don’t want to
- Longing, missing, and wanting to search for the person who died
- Children and adolescents are particularly likely to worry that they or a parent might die
- Children and adolescents may become anxious when separated from caregivers or other loved ones

## WHAT HELPS

Talking to another person for support or spending time with others  
Engaging in positive distracting activities (sports, hobbies, reading)  
Getting adequate rest and eating healthy meals  
Trying to maintain a normal schedule  
Scheduling pleasant activities  
Taking breaks  
Reminiscing about a loved one who has died

Focusing on something practical that you can do right now to manage the situation better  
Using relaxation methods (breathing exercises, meditation, calming self-talk, soothing music)  
Participating in a support group  
Exercising in moderation  
Keeping a journal  
Seeking counseling

## WHAT DOESN'T HELP

Using alcohol or drugs to cope

Working too much

Extreme avoidance of thinking or talking about the event or a death of a loved one

Extreme withdrawal from family or friends

Violence or conflict

Not taking care of yourself

Overeating or failing to eat

Doing risky things (driving recklessly, substance abuse, not taking adequate precautions)

Excessive TV or computer games

Withdrawing from pleasant activities

Blaming others

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## Parent Tips for Helping Adolescents after Disasters

Reactions	Responses	Examples of things to do and say
<p><u>Detachment, shame, and guilt</u></p>	<p>► Provide a safe time to discuss with your teen the events and their feelings. ► Emphasize that these feelings are common, and correct excessive self-blame with realistic explanations of what actually could have been done.</p>	<p>► “Many kids—and adults—feel like you do, angry and blaming themselves that they couldn’t do more. You’re not at fault—remember, even the firefighters said there was nothing more we could have done.”</p>
<p><u>Self-consciousness about their fears, sense of vulnerability, fear of being labeled abnormal</u></p>	<p>► Help teens understand that these feelings are common. ► Encourage relationships with family and peers for needed support during the recovery period.</p>	<p>► “I was feeling the same thing. Scared and helpless. Most people feel like this when a disaster happens, even if they look calm on the outside.”</p> <p>► “My cell phone is working again, why don’t you see if you can get a hold of Pete to see how he’s doing.” ► “And thanks for playing the game with your little sister. She’s much better now.”</p>
<p><u>Acting out behavior; using alcohol and drugs, sexual acting out, accident-prone behavior.</u></p>	<p>► Help teens understand that acting out behavior is a dangerous way to express strong feelings (like anger) over what happened. ► Limit access to alcohol and drugs. ► Talk about the danger of high-risk sexual activity. ► On a time-limited basis, have them let you know where they are going and what they’re planning to do.</p>	<p>► “Many teens—and some adults—feel out of control and angry after a disaster like this. They think drinking or taking drugs will help somehow. It’s very normal to feel that way—but it’s not a good idea to act on it.” ► “It’s important during these times that I know where you are and how to contact you.” Assure them that this extra checking-in is temporary, just until things have stabilized.</p>
<p><u>Fears of recurrence and reactions to reminders</u></p>	<p>► Help to identify different reminders (people, places, sounds, smells, feelings, time of day) and to clarify the difference between the event and the reminders that occur after it. ► Explain to teens that media coverage of the disaster can trigger fears of it happening again.</p>	<p>► “When you’re reminded, you might try saying to yourself, ‘I am upset now because I am being reminded, but it is different now because there is no hurricane and I am safe.’” ► Suggest “Watching the news reports could make it worse, because they are playing the same images over and over. How about turning it off now?”</p>

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## Parent Tips for Helping Adolescents after Disasters

Reactions	Responses	Examples of things to do and say
<p>Abrupt shifts in interpersonal relationships: Teens may pull away from parents, family, and even from peers; they may respond strongly to parent's reactions in the crisis.</p>	<p>► Explain that the strain on relationships is expectable. Emphasize that we need family and friends for support during the recovery period.            ► Encourage tolerance for different family member's courses to recovery. ► Accept responsibility for your own feelings.</p>	<p>► Spend more time talking as a family about how everyone is doing. Say, "You know, the fact that we're crabby with each other is completely normal, given what we've been through. I think we're handling things amazingly. It's a good thing we have each other." ► You might say, "I appreciate your being calm when your brother was screaming last night. I know he woke you up too." ► "I want to apologize for being irritable with you yesterday. I am going to work harder to stay calm myself."</p>
<p><u>Radical changes in attitude</u></p>	<p>► Explain that changes in people's attitudes after a disaster are common, but will return back to normal over time.</p>	<p>► "We are all under great stress. When people's lives are disrupted this way, we all feel more scared, angry—even full of revenge. It might not seem like it, but we all will feel better when we get back to a more structured routine."</p>
<p><u>Wanting premature entrance into adulthood:</u> (e.g., wanting to leave school, get married)</p>	<p>► Encourage postponing major life decisions. Find other ways to make the adolescent feel more in control over things.</p>	<p>► "I know you're thinking about quitting school and getting a job to help out. But it's important not to make big decisions right now. A crisis time is not a great time to make major changes."</p>
<p><u>Concern for other victims and families</u></p>	<p>► Encourage constructive activities on behalf of others, but do not burden with undo responsibility.</p>	<p>► Help teens to identify projects that are age-appropriate and meaningful (e.g., clearing rubble from school grounds, collecting money or supplies for those in need).</p>

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Tips for Adults after Disasters		
Reactions/Behavior	Responses	Examples of things to do and say
<p><u>High anxiety/arousal</u> - Tension and anxiety are common after disasters. Adults may be excessively worried about the future, have difficulties sleeping, problems concentrating, and feel jumpy and nervous. These reactions can include rapid heart beat and sweating.</p>	<p>► Use breathing and/or other relaxation skills</p>	<p>► Take time during the day to calm yourself through relaxation exercises to make it easier to sleep, concentrate, and give you energy. ► Try a breathing exercise as follows: Inhale slowly through your nose and comfortably fill your lungs all the way down to your stomach, while saying to yourself, "My body is filled with calmness." Exhale slowly through your mouth and comfortably empty your lungs, while silently saying to yourself, "My body is releasing the tension." Do this five times slowly, and as many times a day as needed.</p>
<p>Concern or shame over your own reactions. Many people have strong reactions after a disaster, including fear and anxiety, difficulty concentrating, shame over how you react and feeling guilty about something. It is expectable and understandable to feel many things in the aftermath of an extremely difficult event.</p>	<p>► Find a good time to discuss your reactions with a family member or trusted friend. ► Remember that these reactions are common and it takes time for them to subside. ► Correct excessive self-blame with realistic assessment of what actually could have been done.</p>	<p>► When talking with someone, find the right time and place, and ask if it is okay to talk about your feelings. ► Remind yourself that your feelings are expectable and you are not "going crazy," and that you are not at fault for the disaster. ► If these feelings persist for a month, or more you may wish to seek professional help.</p>
<p>Feeling overwhelmed by tasks that need to be accomplished (for example, housing, food, paperwork for insurance, child care, parenting)</p>	<p>► Identify what your top priorities are. ► Find out what services are available to help get your needs met. ► Make a plan that breaks down the tasks into manageable steps.</p>	<p>► Make a list of your concerns and decide what to tackle first? Take it a step at a time. ► Find out which agencies can help with your needs and how to access them. ► Where appropriate, rely on your family, friends, and community for practical assistance.</p>
<p><u>Fears of recurrence and reactions to reminders</u> - it is common for survivors to fear that another disaster will occur, and to react to things that are reminders of what happened</p>	<p>► Be aware that reminders can include people, places, sounds, smells, feelings, time of day. ► Remember that media coverage of the disaster can be a reminder and trigger fears of it happening again.</p>	<p>► When you are reminded, try saying to yourself, "I am upset because I am being reminded of the disaster, but it is different now because the disaster is not happening and I am safe." ► Monitor and limit your viewing of news reports so you just get the information that you need.</p>
<p><u>Changes in attitude, view of the world and of oneself</u> - Strong changes in people's attitudes after a disaster are common. These can include questioning ones spiritual beliefs, trust in others and social agencies, and concerns about ones own effectiveness, and dedication to helping others.</p>	<p>► Postpone any major unnecessary life changes in the immediate future ► Remember that dealing with post-disaster difficulties increases your sense of courage and effectiveness. ► Get involved with community recovery efforts.</p>	<p>► Remember that getting back to a more structured routine can help improve decision-making. ► Remind yourself that going through a disaster can have positive effects on what you value and how you spend your time. ► Consider engaging in community recovery projects.</p>

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## Tips for Adults after Disasters

Reactions/Behavior	Responses	Examples of things to do and say
<p>Using alcohol and drugs, or engaging in gambling or high-risk sexual behaviors - Many people feel out of control, scared, hopeless, or angry after a disaster and engage in these behaviors to feel better. This can especially be a problem if there was pre-existing substance abuse or addiction.</p> <p>Shifts in interpersonal relationships - People may feel differently towards family and friends; for example, they may feel overprotective and very concerned for each other's safety, frustrated by the reactions of a family member or friend, or they may feel like pulling away from family and friends.</p>	<p>► Understand that using substances and engaging in addictive behaviors can be a dangerous way to cope with what happened. ► Get information about local support agencies</p> <p>► Understand that family and friends are a major form of support during the recovery period. ► It is important to understand and tolerate different courses of recovery among family members. ► Rely on other family members for help with parenting or other daily activities when you are upset or under stress.</p>	<p>► Remember that substance use and other addictive behaviors can lead to problems with sleep, relationships, jobs, and physical health. ► Get appropriate help.</p> <p>► Don't withdraw from seeking support just because you feel you might burden someone else. Most people do better after disasters with good support from others. ► Don't be afraid to ask your friends and family how they are doing, rather than just giving advice, or trying to get them to "get over it." Let them know you understand, and offer a supportive ear or lend a helping hand. ► Spend more time talking with family and friends about how everyone is doing. Say, "You know, the fact that we're crabby with each other is completely normal, given what we've been through. I think we're handling things amazingly. It's a good thing we have each other."</p>
<p><u>Excessive anger</u> - Some degree of anger is understandable and expected after a disaster, especially when something feels unfair. However, when it leads to violent behavior, extreme anger is a serious problem.</p>	<p>► Find ways to manage your anger in a way that helps you rather than hurts you.</p>	<p>► Manage your anger by taking time to cool down, walk away from stressful situations, talk to a friend about what is making you angry, get physical exercise, distract yourself with positive activities or problem-solve the situation that is making you angry. ► Remind yourself that being angry will not get you what you want, and may harm important relationships. ► If you become violent, get immediate help.</p>
<p><u>Sleep difficulties</u> - Sleep problems are common after a disaster, as people are on edge and worried about adversities and life changes. This can make it more difficult to fall asleep and lead to frequent awakenings during the night.</p>	<p>► Make sure you have good sleep routines.</p>	<p>► Try to go to sleep at the same time every day. ► Don't drink caffeinated beverages in the evening. ► Reduce alcohol consumption. ► Increase daytime exercise. ► Relax before bedtime. ► Limit daytime naps to 15 minutes, and do not nap later than 4 pm.</p>