

Psychological First Aid for Disaster Survivors

Re-create Sense of Safety

- Provide for basic needs (food, clothing, medical care)
- Ensure that survivors are safe and protected from reminders of the event
- Protect them from on-lookers and the media
- Help them establish a “personal space” and preserve privacy and modesty

Encourage Social Support

- Help survivors connect with family and friends (most urgently, children with parents)
- Educate family and friends about survivors’ normal reactions and how they can help
- www.MYCEpaz.com is a website and mobile app designed by youth for youth to help teens manage stress. It is a safe and intimate space for teens to release their thoughts, tension and hopefully find inner peace

Re-establish Sense of Efficacy

- Give survivors accurate simple information about plans and events
- Allow survivors to discuss events and feelings, but do not probe
- Encourage them to re-establish normal routines and roles when possible
- Help resolve practical problems, such as getting transportation
- Discuss self-care and strategies to reduce anxiety, such as grounding and relaxation techniques
- Encourage survivors to support and assist others

Youth are more likely to have stronger emotional reactions to the event if:

- They witnessed the event firsthand or whose parent, relative or friend was killed or injured,
- They are displaced from their home or school,
- They have a past history of emotional problems,
- They have past history of trauma, either as victim or witness to violence or abuse,
- They have pre-existing physical, developmental, cognitive, or emotional disabilities,
- They are from an ethnic population or prior to the disaster were living in a low socioeconomic environment without a strong support system, or
- They have an adult in their life who is having difficulty with their emotions.

Helpful Hints to Assist Children During a Disaster

For children under age 5:

- Ask what makes them feel better
- Give plenty of hugs and physical reassurance

For children older than age 5:

- Don’t be afraid to ask them what is on their mind and answer their questions honestly
- Talk to them about the news and any adult conversations they have heard
- Make sure they have opportunities to talk with peers if possible
- Set gentle but firm limits for acting out behavior
- Listen to child’s repeated retelling of the event