

CONNECTION 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 other people.

Reasons Why People May Avoid Social Support

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not knowing what they need • Feeling embarrassed or “weak” • Feeling they will lose control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wanting to avoid thinking or feeling about the event • Feeling that others will be disappointed or judgmental • Not knowing where to get help
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Good Things to Do When Giving Support

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Show interest, attention, and care • Find an uninterrupted time and place to talk • Be free of expectations or judgments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
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Things That Interfere with Giving Support

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
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When Your Support is not Enough

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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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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 feeling 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

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, friend 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

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>Talking to another person for support or spending time with others</i> ✓ <i>Engaging in positive distracting activities (sports, hobbies, reading)</i> ✓ <i>Getting adequate rest and eating healthy meals</i> ✓ <i>Trying to maintain a normal schedule</i> ✓ <i>Scheduling pleasant activities</i> ✓ <i>Taking breaks</i> ✓ <i>Reminiscing about a loved one who has died</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>Focusing on something practical that you can do right now to manage the situation better</i> ✓ <i>Using relaxation methods (breathing exercises, meditation, calming self-talk, soothing music)</i> ✓ <i>Participating in a support group</i> ✓ <i>Exercising in moderation</i> ✓ <i>Keeping a journal</i> ✓ <i>Seeking counseling</i>
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WHAT DOESN'T HELP

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using alcohol or drugs to cope • Extreme withdrawal from family or friends • Overeating or failing to eat • Withdrawing from pleasant activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working too much • Violence or conflict • Doing risky things (driving recklessly, substance abuse, not taking adequate precautions) • Blaming others 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extreme avoidance of thinking or talking about the event or a death of a love one • Not taking care of yourself • Excessive TV or Computer games
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CONNECTING WITH OTHERS

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

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Spouse or partner ✚ Trusted family member ✚ Close friend 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Priest, Rabbi, or other clergy ✚ Doctor or nurse ✚ Crisis counselor or other counselor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✚ Support group ✚ Co-worker ✚ Pet
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DO....

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Decide carefully whom talk to ➤ Decide ahead of time what you want to discuss ➤ Choose the right time and place 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Start by talking about practical things ➤ Let others know you need to talk or just to be with them ➤ Talk about painful thoughts and feelings when you're ready 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Ask others if it's good time to talk ➤ Tell others you appreciate them listening ➤ Tell others what you need or how they could help-one main thing that would help you right now
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DON'T....

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep quiet because you don't want to upset others • Keep quiet because you're worried about being a burden 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assume that others don't want to listen • Wait until you're so stressed or exhausted that you can't fully benefit from help
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Ways to Get Connected

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Calling friends or family on the phone ➤ Increasing contact with existing acquaintances and friends ➤ Renewing or beginning involvement in church, synagogue, or other religious group activities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Getting involved with a support group ➤ Getting involved in community recovery activities
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