

## POST DISASTER STRESS MANAGEMENT FOR PARENTS

The potential magnitude of death and destruction in the aftermath of a disaster requires special attention to communicating with children and adolescents. Physical safety and security takes priority.

It is difficult to predict the kinds of psychological problems that children and adolescents will have, however, the following management plan may help minimize later difficulties:

- Your response to the disaster will affect your child's response, therefore, it is helpful to discuss your own reactions with another adult before talking with your children.
- Discuss the event in an open, honest manner with your children. Children might want to talk intermittently, and younger children might need concrete information repeated.
- Be available for your child.
- Limit the amount of exposure to television or other sources of information about the disaster and its victims.
- Engage your child in conversation of their choosing — not necessarily about their feelings or the scene. Talking about the normal events of life is central to health.
- Maintain daily routines to the extent possible. Now is not the time to introduce new routines. For children,

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familiar places and activities such as school and bedtime stories are an important part of feeling safe and normal.

- Increase your child's sense of control and mastery within the household — let them plan dinner or the evening's activities.
- Every child has a different way of responding to trauma. It is not advisable to require the same response of everyone. Listen to your child's stories.
- Reassure your children that the disaster was not their fault in any way.
- Older children and adolescents may feel "stirred up". Helping them understand their behavior and setting limits can help.
- Some children may respond with a return to old behaviors, such as a loss of toilet training, or inability to fall asleep alone. These should be tolerated and understood.
- Help your child modulate the extent to which they personalize or identify with the victims or the situation. Remind your children that they are safe and with you.
- Provide concrete information about the disaster to your child to decrease over-identifying with the victims.