

Helping Your Family Cope: For Parents

Reestablish Family Routines

Reestablish family routines to the extent possible after an emergency. Try to maintain routines such as meal times, bedtime, reading time, and playtime, and to set aside time for the family to enjoy activities together.

Develop Tolerance among Family Members

Assist family members in developing a mutual understanding of their different experiences, reactions, and course of recovery. Encourage family members to be understanding, patient, and tolerant of differences in their reactions to the event, and to talk about things that are bothering them, so that the others will know when and how to support them.

Family members can help each other by:

- Listening and trying to understand
- Comforting with a hug
- Doing something thoughtful like writing a note
- Getting the child's mind off the event by playing a game

Even though family members have gone through the same crisis, they may have very different feelings and reactions to it. These differences can lead to misunderstandings, arguments, and an inability to support each other well.

Pay special attention to your children's behavior. Out of control or unusual behavior could mean that your children are troubled by reminders and hardships from the event. For example, children may look as if they are having a temper tantrum, when actually they are acting out because they have been reminded that a friend was hurt or killed.

Give Special Attention to Adolescents

Adolescents may find that you are more anxious about their safety and, consequently, more restrictive in what you allow your teens to do, after the family has faced a crisis. Help adolescents to understand that this increase in your protective behaviors is common and usually temporary. Knowing that the "strictness" will not last forever will help teenagers avoid unnecessary conflict as the family recovers.

Common Caregiver Reactions:

- Setting earlier curfews
- Limiting adolescents from going off by themselves without adult supervision
- Insisting that teens call in frequently to let you know that they are safe
- Restricting "everyday" risks (driving a car or doing skateboarding tricks) even if you formerly permitted it

Parents worry more about their kids' safety after a crisis, so they often have more restrictions. Remind teens to cut you some slack. This increase in supervision is usually only temporary, and will probably drop off as things start to settle down.