

## **Coping with Emotions of a Major Disaster**

### **Plan Ahead**

Whatever the crisis, some planning before the disaster can usually help family members react wisely. Families that work together to prepare for the problem will cope better than those who do not. Consider how your children might react in a disaster. What would your own reactions be? The crisis can affect each person's emotional and physical well-being.

Plan in advance how to deal with the situation. Follow the advice provided here. Discuss and practice plans with family members before a disaster strikes. Work together to help everyone understand the procedures.

### **Venting Feelings**

**Listening:** In time of trouble and crisis, many people need someone who will just listen. Talking about the experience helps the burden seem a little lighter and easier to bear. If you are feeling "blue" or "down," you may want to contact a friend or neighbor, a family member, your pastor or rabbi, or someone else you feel you can really talk to as a friend.

If you find yourself called upon to listen to a friend or neighbor who just wants to talk, please listen. Some people will feel very much alone and afraid; others will blame themselves and wonder,

"Why me?" They are not really looking for an answer to that question, but rather are saying, "How can I endure this?" "How can I go on?" Solutions, answers and advice aren't necessary. Just listen and let the troubled person talk.

If your friend or neighbor needs to cry, encourage him/her to do so. This is a release of tension and sadness. If your friend or neighbor is angry or frustrated, encourage him/her to vent these feelings, too. Remember, the anger is not directed at you, but reflects a feeling of loss of control over the situation, of material possessions, of home or business.

Some victims of disasters may not initially display much emotion. However, this is normal and it may take several days or weeks for them to begin coping/expressing anxiety.

### **Providing Support**

Sometimes people, who are very upset or frightened, later are embarrassed about expressing those feelings. They may feel "weak," or that they have "dumped" on you. Reassure your friend by saying that his/her feelings are normal and perfectly understandable. Be sure that your friend knows you are available to listen again, if he or she needs to talk.

One of the most effective ways of coping is to look positively at even the most difficult situations. After you have listened, help your friend. Look at any positive things that have come from the experience (e.g. family is closer). Help her/him to look toward the future, when things will be better.

If you are concerned that someone is very depressed and you do not feel you are able to help, be sure he/she does get help from a trained professional. Suggest a counselor, member of the religious community, social worker, or support group to help your friend through this period.

### **Seeking Help**

The Coast Guard offers support through the Worklife program that includes EAP. You can contact the Coast Guard EAP directly at 1-800-222-0364.

Seek assistance from the Coast Guard Worklife office at ISC Miami 1-800-USCG-WLS ext 307 or office 305-278-6660.

If the Hurricane Assistance Team (HAT) is deployed to your area, contact the Team Leader upon return home.

Contact Mike Burden or John Garcia at ISC Miami Worklife office or Chaplain Melody Goodwin at 305-415-6675 if you need further information and/or assistance.