

Handout: 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

- Spouse or partner
- Priest, Rabbi, or other clergy
- Support group
- Trusted family member
- Doctor or nurse
- Co-worker
- Close friend
- Crisis counselor or other counselor
- Pet

Do...

- Decide carefully whom to talk to
- Start by talking about practical things
- Ask others if it's a good time to talk
- Decide ahead of time what you want to discuss
- Let others know you need to talk or just to be with them
- Tell others you appreciate them listening
- Choose the right time and place
- Talk about painful thoughts and feelings when you're ready
- Tell others what you need or how they could help—one main thing that would help you right now

Don't...

- Keep quiet because you don't want to upset others
- Assume that others don't want to listen
- Keep quiet because you're worried about being a burden
- Wait until you're so stressed or exhausted that you can't fully benefit from help

Ways to get Connected

- Calling friends or family on the phone
- Getting involved with a support group
- Increasing contact with existing acquaintances and friends
- Getting involved in community recovery activities
- Renewing or beginning involvement in church, synagogue, or other religious group activities

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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 to other people.

Reasons Why People May Avoid Social Support

- Not knowing what they need
- Not wanting to burden others
- Wanting to avoid thinking or feeling about the event
- Feeling embarrassed or “weak”
- Doubting it will be helpful, or that others won’t understand
- Feeling that others will be disappointed or judgmental
- Feeling they will lose control
- Having tried to get help and felt that it wasn’t there before
- Not knowing where to get help

Good Things to Do When Giving Support

- Show interest, attention, and care
- Show respect for individuals’ reactions and ways of coping
- Talk about expectable reactions to disasters, and healthy coping
- Find an uninterrupted time and place to talk
- Acknowledge that this type of stress can take time to resolve
- Believe that the person is capable of recovery
- Be free of expectations or judgments
- Help brainstorm positive ways to deal with their reactions
- Offer to talk or spend time together as many times as is needed

Things That Interfere with Giving Support

- Rushing to tell someone that he/she will be okay or that they should just “get over it”
- Acting like someone is weak or exaggerating because he or she isn’t coping as well as you are
- Discussing your own personal experiences without listening to the other person’s story
- Giving advice without listening to the person’s concerns or asking the person what works for him or her
- Stopping the person from talking about what is bothering them
- Telling them they were lucky it wasn’t worse

When Your Support is Not Enough

- 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 talk with a counselor, clergy, or medical professional, and offer to accompany them
- Encourage the person to get involved in a support group with others who have similar experiences
- Enlist help from others in your social circle so that you all take part in supporting the person