

## HOW ADULTS CAN HELP CHILDREN COPE

We cannot know how a child is experiencing grief or anxiety unless we listen! Children express their feelings in different ways. Accept that some children will react by becoming withdrawn and unable to talk, while others will feel intensely upset at times and at other times will act as if the events never happened. Don't be surprised if some children don't seem to be affected by what they have seen and heard. Not everyone has immediate reactions; some have delayed reactions that show up later, and some may never have a reaction.

**The following questions may be very helpful in creating an opportunity to know how a child is feeling:**

- What worries/saddens/upsets you the most now?
- What is the worst part/the hardest part for you now?
- Do you have any questions about what has happened or is happening?
- What helps you feel a little better?
- What helps you feel a little safer?

**Reassure children and teens that they are safe, that you are also okay by the following:**

- Listen
- Maintain routines
- Encourage time for children to share their feelings with their peers
- Limit television coverage for children and for adolescents, discuss what they see and hear by asking questions, be aware of social network information
- Do not criticize regressive behavior, the need for comfort food, etc.
- Allow your child to be sad or to be afraid, but also reassure that you will take care of them and their fear will change in time
- Encourage children to exercise some control by making decisions about what they want to eat, wear, etc.
- Reaffirm the importance of family by spending time together
- Encourage physical activities as well as activities that let them feel better
- Explain it is normal to feel worried/sad/angry but that everyone is working hard to be safe
- Do not speculate or exaggerate
- If you cannot answer a question, be honest and simply let the child know that, in life, there are things that happen which we have no answers for
- If you are feeling so upset and don't want to talk, take a "time out" and ask a trusted family friend to help
- Be especially loving and supportive; children need you at this time

**Emphasize children's resiliency and ability to cope.** Focus on their competencies in terms of their daily life and in other difficult times. Help children identify what they have done in the past that helped them cope when they were frightened or upset.

*This information is taken from the following resources:*

*American Red Cross Disaster Services, National Association of School Psychologists, and the National Institute for Trauma in Children*

Contact your child's School Guidance Counselor for additional resources and assistance.