

TIPS FOR PARENTS TO HELP THEMSELVES

Compiled with permission by the UNICEF South Asia Counseling Section from 'Caring for Kids After Trauma, Disaster and Death: A GUIDE FOR PARENTS AND PROFESSIONALS'

When a disaster or tragedy occurs, parents are often concerned with how to best help their children while they are also trying to deal with their own shock or response to the event. Both children and adults often become scared and confused. Like adults, children are most likely to be worried about their family and significant people in their lives including friends and care-givers. The following tips may guide parents to help themselves and their children cope after a traumatic event:

1. Allow yourself time to heal.

Parents are often so focused on taking care of their families, that they do not take the time to take care of themselves. Allow yourself time and space to express your feelings about what happened. Be patient with your emotional state, as it is normal after a trauma to experience mood fluctuations.

2. Ask for and provide support.

Spend time talking with other adults who will understand what you are going through. While it is always a good idea to seek support from loved ones, remember that those in your typical support system may be compromised if they experienced the same event. If this is the case, you may want to find out about local support groups.

3. To the extent possible, engage in healthy behaviors such as eating nutritious meals, drinking sufficient amounts of water and getting adequate rest.

Those who are able to maintain healthy behaviors tend to feel more in control of their lives and are more able to cope effectively. Avoid the use of drugs and alcohol.

4. Maintain regular routines for eating, sleeping and exercising.

Keeping to routines is helpful for both parents and children in restoring some level of normalcy for the family after a traumatic event.

5. Avoid making major life decisions.

While it may be tempting to move or change jobs after a traumatic event, it is usually best to avoid making major life decisions during times of stress and turmoil.

6. If you are having difficulty functioning or are unable to perform daily tasks, consult with your physician or mental health professional.

Remember that you will be of no help to your family if you are also having difficulties in coping and helping yourself.