



## A LifeCare® Digest on Coping with Tragedy

The recent incidents of terrorism have shocked, saddened and angered the nation, and left many people—both those directly and indirectly affected—wondering how to deal with the aftermath of such tragic events. This digest offers tips and information on taking care of yourself, helping others cope and talking to your children about violence.

### Disaster Relief

If you are in an area that has been directly affected by the terrorism, your first priority should be your own safety and that of your family. If you are in need of emergency services (shelter, clothing, food, money, etc.) contact one of the many emergency hotlines listed at the end of this digest. In addition, safeguard yourself and your family by taking the following tips into consideration:

- ? Listen to the television, radio or a portable radio for information on shelters, helpful resources and safety advisories.
- ? Stay out of and away from damaged buildings. Return home only when authorities say it is safe. Children should be constantly supervised.
- ? Be alert for potential hazards. Take extreme care when moving in an area that has been damaged. It is possible that shattered glass, splintered wood or other sharp objects will be strewn around even in areas quite far from the affected locations.
- ? Cooperate with authorities. Whether you're asked to relinquish telephone lines, keep off emergency roads or given other directions, do your best to comply.
- ? Use caution when traveling.
- ? Be cautious with food. When electricity is out, refrigerated foods can spoil quickly; throw out any food that is questionable. Frozen foods will typically last in a closed freezer for several days.
- ? Be cautious with drinking water. Water supplies can become contaminated in damaged areas. Radio reports will typically notify residents if your water is safe to drink. Try to drink bottled water until you know for sure. On average, you need one gallon of water per family member per day. (*Tip*—you can obtain safe water by melting ice cubes.)
- ? Remember to help others who may require special assistance—infants, the elderly and people with disabilities.

### Reactions to a Traumatic Event

Disasters such as the terrorist attacks that occurred today can result in extreme emotions including stress, helplessness, fear, irritability, anger, depression and grief. Although everyone deals with trauma and stress differently, there are some common reactions, including:

- ? Recurring thoughts or nightmares about the event
- ? Difficulty sleeping or changes in appetite
- ? Anxiety and fear, especially when exposed to events or situations reminiscent of the trauma
- ? Feelings of depression, sadness and having low energy

- ? Memory problems including difficulty remembering aspects of the trauma
- ? Difficulty focusing on work or daily activities
- ? Spontaneous crying, feelings of despair and/or hopelessness
- ? Avoiding activities, places or even people who remind you of the event
- ? Feeling emotionally “numb,” withdrawn, disconnected or different from others
- ? Feeling extremely protective of, or fearful for, the safety of loved ones

If you or a loved one are experiencing extreme symptoms of stress, depression, grief or anger, consult a professional such as your doctor or Employee Assistance Program (EAP) immediately for help.

Additionally, many temporary shelters offer free counseling services to victims—or referrals to professionals who can provide further assistance. In addition, consider the following tips:

- ? Reach out to supportive friends and family for comfort and guidance.
- ? Be patient and give yourself plenty of time to recover and rest.
- ? Try to maintain a nutritious diet to keep your energy up.
- ? Focus on your breathing—deep, slow breaths will help calm you.

Keep in mind that emotional and physical reactions to a traumatic event may not appear immediately. Sometimes they may appear hours, days or even weeks or months after the event. The signs and symptoms of a stress reaction may last a few days, a few weeks, months or possibly longer depending on the severity of the event. According to the American Psychological Association, individuals who are unable to regain control of their lives, or who experience the symptoms above for more than a month, should consider seeking professional mental health assistance.

### **How Children React to Trauma**

How a child responds to a tragic event will vary depending on a child’s age, personality and maturity level—and how directly he or she was involved with the tragedy. Children that were directly affected by an incident may suffer from severe anxiety or trauma—and will probably need professional help. All children, however, may be affected by the violence.

Younger children may react by showing more separation anxiety when their parents leave them at child care or school. Some children, particularly those age nine and under, may be unable to grasp the reality of the tragedy, or comprehend that violence could affect their own lives. Others may be frightened that something could happen to them. Older children may present a rough exterior or act out with aggressive behavior, and still others may attempt to protect themselves through denial, cynicism or apathy. Some signs of anxiety that may indicate your child is having difficulty dealing with the stress of a traumatic event include:

- ? Disrupted sleep patterns—frequent nightmares and/or insomnia
- ? Changes in eating habits—loss of appetite or overeating
- ? Decline in school performance
- ? Lack of concentration
- ? Irritability or prolonged depression
- ? Separation anxiety
- ? Unusual clinginess
- ? Regression

Remember, these symptoms are common reactions to anxiety. However, if symptoms persist for longer than six weeks and disrupt your child's daily routine, seek help from a pediatrician, psychologist or social worker. A professional can help your child deal with his or her emotions and can provide valuable tips and guidance to parents.

In addition, ask your employer if they offer an EAP (Employee Assistance Program). An EAP counselor can provide counseling on a wide range of issues, including stress, anxiety, dealing with violence and more.

### **How Can Parents Help?**

Speak to your child about the tragedy openly and honestly, adapting your conversations to the age of the child. Children deserve honest answers, regardless of their age. You do not have to provide every detail, but don't hold back too much information, either; instill trust in your child while helping him or her understand what happened.

The following tips may help:

**Encourage your child to express his or her feelings.** Children usually feel better when they can talk about their feelings. To help your child sort out his or her feelings, ask specific questions such as "How do you feel? Does it make you feel scared? What worries you the most?"

Encourage your child to be honest and open, and listen carefully for clues about hidden feelings or worries.

**Reassure your child.** Respond to your child's feelings; acknowledge his or her fears; and continually reassure your child that he or she is safe. Stress that this was a rare incident, and that he or she is not in danger, but avoid making false promises such as "Nothing like this will ever happen to you." Instead, offer your love, support and guidance and say things such as "I am here to protect you and to help keep you safe." In addition, remind your child that others such as the police and government are also doing everything they can to keep us safe.

**Monitor the media.** Monitor and limit the amount of television your child watches. If your child sees disturbing footage, his or her fears and anxieties may escalate. Do not allow younger children (under age eight) to watch television. Older children should watch television (briefly) with parental supervision. Explain to them what is going on and then shut the TV off, saying you will check back later.

**Speak to your child's school administrators.** Ask your child's teachers and/or school principal how they are handling the event. Are classes proceeding as normal? Are crisis counselors available? Many schools speak to students about safety issues, and reassure them that they are doing everything possible to keep the children safe.

**Pay close attention to your child.** If you notice any unusual behavior, it may be a reaction to stress, fear or trauma. Learn how to recognize the warning signs (as described in the previous section) and seek professional help from a pediatrician, counselor, social worker, psychologist or other professional if necessary.

### **Emergency Resources**

Numerous organizations have set up emergency services to assist people with finding information about a loved one or other important information.

## **Airlines**

If you have a question about a loved one on any flight, family members can call these numbers for further information. If you can provide details on the flight (flight number, time of flight, origin or destination of the flight), this will assist representatives to find out more information.

**Air CANADA: 800-521-0810**

**American Airlines: 800-245-0999**

**Canadian Air: 888-247-2262**

**Continental Airlines: 800-525-0280**

**Delta Airlines: 800-221-1212**

**Jet Blue: 888-538-2583**

**Midway: 800-446-4392**

**Northwest Airlines: 800-225 2525**

**Southwest Airlines: 214-792-4223**

**TWA: 800-221-2000**

**United Airlines: 800-932-8555**

**US Airways: 800-428-4322**

## **Additional Resources**

Following a disaster such as the recent terrorist attacks, emergency management organizations provide shelter, first aid, food and counseling to assist victims and their families. To find the shelter nearest you contact your local Red Cross chapter or call one of the hotlines below:

### **American Psychological Association**

750 First Street N.E.

Washington, DC 20002

202-336-5500

<http://www.apa.org/>

Crisis Counseling Assistance line: 202-336-5800

This nonprofit organization provides information and referrals to state associations that can help you find local clinical psychologists. They are offering crisis counseling to anyone who needs it during this tragic time.

### **American Red Cross Hotline: 800-435-7669**

<http://www.redcross.org>

The American Red Cross has activated its Aviation Incident Response Team to both the Boston and New York City areas. To donate blood in any area, call 800-448-3543. The Red Cross will also provide crisis mental health counseling. To find out more information contact the Red Cross at 800-435-7669.

### **FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency):**

FEMA has set up a toll-free Help line: 800-525-0321

(Or 800-462-7585 for the hearing and speech impaired)

500 C St., S.W.

Washington, D.C. 20472

<http://www.fema.gov>

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is an independent agency of the federal government, reporting to the President. FEMA's mission is to reduce loss of life and property and protect our nation's means of communication. They have set up a task force to address any concerns or needed assistance with this tragedy.

**Morgan Stanley Hotline: 888-883-4391**

Morgan Stanley, the largest tenant in the World Trade Center, established this emergency contact phone number for employees and their families.

*Note*—For those who would like to help, these organizations are always seeking volunteers, donations and financial aid. Additionally, following such an event, blood donations are always needed. As needs vary by location and continually change in the days following a disaster, it is best to call these agencies for a list of specific needs before you make a donation or to see how volunteers are needed.

As always, LifeCare specialists are also available 24 hours a day to provide information and referrals.

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