



## What Grieving People Need

***Children and adults need the facts.*** Explain simply and accurately what has happened and don't speculate beyond what you are sure is true. Ask them if they have any questions or particular worries about the disaster; if there are particular people they are concerned about, do your best to obtain the information they need.

***Children and adults need opportunities to share feelings and experiences.*** Ask them how they are feeling about what has happened and bear in mind that sharing some of your own feelings will help them talk about their own feelings and concerns. Remember that children may express their feelings through behaviors rather than words so be alert for behaviors that indicate they might be worried and not talking about it. Inviting children to make drawings, a clay sculpture or playing with puppets are other ways of helping them get at unexpressed feelings. Remember that children typically deal with grief in short spurts and can seem very upset one minute and unconcerned the next: also remember that children will differ in their pace and style of grieving... for example some will act out angrily, others will withdraw sullenly.

***Children need to feel safe.*** Stay with your children if possible; try not to leave them alone or with strangers. Keep assuring them of what is safe and stable in their lives. Many children will become very anxious about being separated from their parents and family members and this may last for a number of weeks. Assure children that they will be cared for and implement a buddy system if you are in charge of classroom or a large group of children.

***Children need to feel a sense of control.*** Keep your regular routine if at all possible; give children specific tasks to do that they are sure to succeed in; this not only keeps them productively busy but gives them a sense of mastery and control (i.e. cleaning out a drawer, setting a table, tidying a room). If appropriate include them in decisions and plans that follow the tragedy.

***Children and adults need to learn their own coping techniques for dealing with the crisis.*** Remember to allow for different understandings of and reactions to the situation. Traumatic grief reactions are natural and normal – and remember that most people can manage their own reactions best if they get some rest, good food, exercise and have access to people who can listen, who can tolerate their pain without trying to make it go away prematurely, and don't criticize their coping techniques.

***Children and adults need to slowly, and in their own way, be allowed to absorb the range of losses that trauma can cause.*** These include loss of control, loss of trust, loss of security and safety, loss of innocence, loss of assumptions about the world, loss of a sense of fairness, loss of personal belongings, loss of relationships.

***Children and adults deserve to have their pain validated.*** If our own issues with grief and trauma are causing us to deny, prejudge, or wish another's pain away it can eclipse their healing. Their pain is real and true even if it frightens or angers you; to deny their pain is to deny them.

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