

## Guidelines for Staff Dealing with Traumatic Events

Staff are often called upon to help the public deal with grief and stress in a supportive and compassionate way. The best way to help is to use your good judgement and empathy. The following suggestions may help you understand what some people may be experiencing and give you supportive ways to respond.

- » Acknowledge and accept that the tragedy may trigger an emotional response in you as well as other staff and community members. It's always difficult to remember and accept that there are events in our lives that can't be predicted or controlled. Recognizing your own feelings will enable you to be more supportive of others.
- » Be aware of the potential impact of "media overload"—both from traditional media and the internet. Ensure there is an understanding of the importance of limiting the exposure to this coverage.
- » If people ask questions, listen carefully to what they are saying and respond in as objective a way as possible. If you don't know an answer, don't be afraid to say so.
- » Accept people's feelings. Allow them to express their remembrances, thoughts and fears—they are not good or bad, right or wrong, they're just there. Emphasize that each person is entitled to their feelings. It's important that everyone has an opportunity to express their concerns and to feel that others are taking those concerns seriously.
- » Do whatever is necessary to reassure people that your community is a safe place.
- » If people express fears or concerns, respond in the most reassuring way possible.
- » Maintain routines as much as possible but understand the need for flexibility if staff or community members need to talk or express their concerns.
- » Be vigilant regarding community members or staff, such as those who:
  - have experienced a recent death in the family
  - have recently come from a country where they have experienced armed conflict
  - have a history of depression, anxiety disorders or other traumas
  - have family away from home at work, universities or college
- » People respond in different ways to tragic events or the recollection of these events. For example, you may notice the following types of reactions:
  - preoccupation with violence and death
  - physical complaints like stomach aches and headaches
  - anxiety, sadness, withdrawal
  - aggression
  - sensitivity to loud noises
  - mood changes
  - difficulty concentrating
- » Should you become aware of staff or community members who continue to experience significant distress—for example, preoccupation with the tragedy—allow them time for consultation with social workers or psycho-educational consultants for further assistance.
- » If possible, try to direct your community toward something constructive they can do.
- » Ask for help. Social workers and psychologists should be made available for staff and community members.