

LOS ANGELES UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
Student Support Services

HOW PARENTS CAN HELP

- Much of the recovery work involving a crisis can best be facilitated by parents.
- The school may meet with parents in small groups and provide information as to what to look for and how they can help their children.
- Some parents may need individual help before they are ready to help their children.
- The school may provide opportunities for parents to discuss, in groups, their own responses and worries.
- Materials such as the following may be provided for parents.

YOUR CHILD NEEDS YOU

You have recently experienced a crisis in your lives. Family routines have been disrupted. You have much to do. As parents of a young child or children, you face tasks that are difficult and demanding.

A crisis affects the members of family or of an entire community. You may be immediately involved or have friends or neighbors who are affected. Likewise, your children may have friends who are involved.

It is hard for young children to understand what has happened to their home and family. Some may have completely mixed-up views of the situation, while others, depending on age and how they experienced the disaster, need your continued guidance and understanding to help them grow through the experience. How you help your child to work through this "problem time" may have a lasting effect.

Children can experience the same intense feelings that you feel about the crisis. This is a normal reaction. Some children may show their feelings in a direct and immediate fashion, others will wait until a later time. Most children will be confused by all the sudden interruption to their routines. This is a very difficult time for them as well as you.

Each child in a family may react differently. You will find listed below some ways you may help children cope with their feelings following a crisis.

FOLLOWING A CRISIS, SOME CHILDREN MAY:

- Become more active and restless.
- If homes have been damaged, worry where they will live and what will happen to them.
- Become upset easily, crying and whining.
- Or be quiet and withdrawn, not wanting to talk about the experience.

HOW PARENTS CAN HELP

- Feel neglected by parents who are busy trying to clean up and rebuild their lives.
- Become afraid of loud noises, rain, storms, etc.
- Be angry. They may hit, throw, kick, to show their anger, often with little provocation.
- Be afraid to be left alone or afraid to sleep alone. They may have nightmares and want to sleep with a parent or another person.
- Behave as they did when younger. They may start sucking their thumb, wetting the bed, asking for a bottle, wanting to be held.
- Have symptoms of illness such as nausea, vomiting, headaches, not wanting to eat, running a fever.
- Be upset at the loss of a favorite toy, blanket, teddy bear, etc.
- Feel guilty that they caused the disaster because of some previous behavior.
- Refuse to go to school or to child care arrangements. The child may not want to be out of your sight.
- Be afraid that the crisis may recur, especially if conditions recur, e.g., rain after flood or aftershocks after earthquake. They may ask many times, "Will it come again?"
- Not show any outward signs until weeks or months later.

WAYS PARENTS CAN HELP THEIR CHILDREN

- Talking with your children, providing simple accurate information to questions. Allow them to tell their stories about what happened.
- Talking with your children about your own feelings.
- Listening to what your children say and how they say it. Repeating your children's words, recognizing fear, anxiety, insecurity, is very helpful. For instance: "You are afraid that..." or, "You wonder if the storm will come again today." This helps both you and the children clarify feelings.
- Reassuring your child: "We are together." "We care about you." "We will take care of you."
- Responding to repeated questions. You may need to repeat information and reassurances many times.
- Holding the child, providing comfort. Touching is important for children during this period.
- Spending extra time putting your child to bed. Talk and offer assurance. Leave night light on if necessary.
- Observing your child at play. Listen to what is said and how the child plays. Frequently, children express feelings of fear or anger while playing with dolls, trucks or friends.
- Providing play experiences to relieve tension. Work with playdough, paint, play in water, give them something safe like a pillow, ball, or balloon.
- Allowing children to mourn and grieve if they lost a meaningful toy or blanket. In time, it may be helpful to replace the lost object.