

Tips for Helping Teenagers

Suggest that teenagers:

- ❑ Take long, slow deep breaths, focusing their attention on each breath. Teens should breathe in through their nose and out through their mouth. Relaxing one's body can bring down heart rate and blood pressure.
- ❑ Take action. This can be a powerful remedy for the helplessness that teens feel after a traumatic event. Encourage teenagers to make a difference by creating a disaster plan for their families, donating blood, helping to raise funds for relief agencies, sending sympathy cards to affected people, or volunteering.
- ❑ Talk with someone they trust about what happened and what they are feeling. Whether this is a parent, teacher, school counselor, member of the clergy, or someone else from the community that the teenager trusts, it is important that teens do not keep their strong feelings and emotions to themselves.
- ❑ Express themselves. If teens find that they are not ready or not comfortable talking with someone, encourage them to release emotions in different ways. Writing everything they are angry about on a piece of paper and then tearing the paper up into small pieces can be a good release.
- ❑ Draw or sketch. Art can also be an effective tool in articulating thoughts, fears, and worries in a less threatening manner.
- ❑ Journal or keep a diary. Keeping a journal of one's feelings and worries about a traumatic experience can help teens effectively work through it. Writing can help teenagers to cope with powerful emotions and disturbing thoughts.
- ❑ Be with friends. Teens should not isolate themselves in times of trauma. Talking with peers can help relieve stress and help them realize that they are not alone with their feelings.
- ❑ Use music to cope. Help teenagers find comforting routines as a way to cope; listening to music is one such routine.

- ❑ Exercise / physical activity. Built-up stress can often be relieved by physical activity. Even mowing the lawn, walking a dog, or washing a car helps to reduce stress.
- ❑ Avoid mood-altering drugs. Alcohol and drugs alter perceptions and emotions and impair one's judgment. Most teens do not realize that alcohol is a depressant and is especially toxic when their bodies are already undergoing high levels of stress and trauma.
- ❑ Get a good night's sleep and eat a balanced diet. Engaging in healthy behaviors enhances in one's ability to cope with excessive stress.
- ❑ Keep to a routine. In times of trauma, a regular schedule is reassuring and comforting.
- ❑ Be aware of what they watch on TV, including news and commercials. Teens should watch only what makes them feel better. Sometimes watching televised images of catastrophic events repeatedly doesn't help; in fact, it may only make things worse.
- ❑ Use their senses to distract themselves when they are sad, anxious, or irritable. Teens can use two or three of the five senses (seeing, hearing, smell, taste, touch) to divert themselves from feeling distressed. Some ideas include putting a mint in their mouth, touching something soft, looking at something pleasant while they listen to nice music, etc.