

# *Coping with Disaster*

**A** disaster of any size will cause unusual and unwanted stress. Here are some suggestions to help you and your family cope.

## **Common Disaster Responses**

- Fear/disbelief
- Reluctance to abandon property
- Disorientation
- Seeking help
- Difficulty making decisions
- Helpfulness to other disaster victims
- Change in appetite/difficulty sleeping
- Anger/suspicion
- Apathy
- Depression/crying for no apparent reason
- Anxiety/frustration
- Feeling of powerlessness
- Concern for the future
- Moodiness and irritability
- Disappointment with outside help
- Guilt
- Domestic violence

## **Helping Yourself**

- Recognize your own feelings
- Talk to others to help relieve stress- you will realize that other victims share your feelings
- Accept help from others
- Take time off and do something you enjoy
- Get enough rest and exercise
- Include your family in recovery activities
- Talk to clergy or other spiritual advisors

## **Helping Your Community**

- Listen to others who are having problems
- Have tolerance for irritability and short tempers- everyone exhibits stress during disasters
- Share information regarding assistance being offered and possible resources

If any of your common disaster responses are severe or continue for an extended period of time, consider consulting a mental health professional.

## **ESPECIALLY FOR CHILDREN**

A child's response to disaster can manifest itself in many ways. Families must pay particular attention to the following responses, especially since many children will not or cannot verbalize their feelings about the disaster.

### **Children's response to disasters**

- Regression and return to behaviors such as thumb sucking or bed wetting
- Clinging/crying/screaming
- Afraid of separation from family
- Nightmares/reluctance to go to bed
- Withdrawal/refusal to attend school/other functions
- Problems at school/lack of concentration
- Fear that a disaster will happen again or fantasies that the disaster never happened

### **Help for children**

- Concentrate on your child's emotional needs as soon as you know the danger has passed
- Encourage your child to draw pictures of the disaster to help you understand how he or she views what happened
- Explain the disaster and its effects in ways that children can understand- don't explain in too much detail, which can cause additional stress and fears
- Do not allow them to watch the news and do not view the news in front of them
- Provide constant reassurance to your child that your family is safe
- Spend extra time with your child, especially at bedtime when fears can arise
- Work closely with teachers, day-care personnel, baby-sitters and others who may not understand how the disaster has affected your child
- Relax rules, but maintain family structure and responsibility
- Keep your family together during recovery- include your child in the process
- Review safety procedures that are now in place and include a role for your child