

# Supporting Others in a Time of Need

All of us cope with difficult or stressful events in our own unique ways. Some people may want to talk openly and receive comfort, while others may prefer to be alone and maintain privacy. It is important to remember that there is no “correct” way to experience emotions or cope during difficult times.

Common reactions in a time of need include:

- ▶ Trouble concentrating on or completing familiar tasks
- ▶ Becoming upset at little things or at how others are reacting
- ▶ Excessive focus on work or other activities
- ▶ Avoiding being alone or withdrawing from others
- ▶ An increased need to vent feelings or talk about concerns
- ▶ Crying, increased sensitivity, or irritability
- ▶ Feeling overwhelmed, helpless, or hopeless

The instinct to “fix” a problem or take away someone’s pain is a normal human reaction. However, you cannot change what has already happened or control how others feel. Instead, focus on being supportive and helping the person to cope. Helpful actions include:

- ▶ Express concern with phrases like:
  - “I’m sorry about what happened.”
  - “I’m thinking about you.”
  - “I don’t know what to say.”

- ▶ Offer practical assistance, such as running errands, delivering food, or helping with child care.
- ▶ If the person needs to talk, listen. If they would prefer to keep their own counsel, respect their privacy.
- ▶ Remember that simply being present may be comforting for some people.
- ▶ If the person who is struggling is a colleague, offer to assist with work tasks (when appropriate).
- ▶ Maintain your own self-care and set good boundaries.
- ▶ If you make a commitment, follow through.

Actions that would be best to avoid include:

- ▶ Making statements like:
  - “I know how you feel.”
  - “You need to get on with your life.”
  - “You shouldn’t feel like...”
  - “Everything will be okay.”
- ▶ Be cautious about expressing unsolicited religious sentiments, as the person’s spiritual beliefs may differ from your own.
- ▶ Do not offer help or support that you cannot realistically provide.
- ▶ Avoid excluding the person from normal activities. Invite them as you normally would and let them decide.

LifeMatters is available to provide support in a time of need. Call 24/7/365.

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