

# Connecting with Others

## Giving and Receiving Social Support

### Seeking Social Support

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Making contact with others can help reduce feelings of distress and help people recover in the aftermath of traumatic events.

Connections can be with family, friends, clergy, or others who are coping with the same traumatic event<sup>1</sup>.

Children and adolescents can benefit from spending some time with other similar aged peers.

### Social Support Options

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- Spouse or partner
- Trusted family member
- Close friend
- Doctor or nurse
- Crisis counselor or other counselor
- Support group
- Co-worker, union representative
- Priest, Rabbi, or other clergy
- Pet

### Do

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- Decide carefully whom to talk to
- Decide ahead of time what you want to discuss
- Choose the right time
- Start by talking about practical things
- Let others know you need to talk or just to be with them
- Talk about painful thoughts and feelings when you are ready
- Ask others if it's a good time to talk
- Tell others you appreciate them listening
- Tell others what you need or how they could help explain one main thing that would help you right now

<sup>1</sup> Traumatic Event, defined: "An event that has the power to overwhelm the normal coping abilities of an individual or group such as a disaster, violence, serious injury, or death".

### Don't

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- Keep quiet because you don't want to upset others
- Keep quiet because you're worried about being a burden
- Assume that others don't want to listen
- Wait until you're so stressed or exhausted that you can't fully benefit from help

### Ways to Get Connected

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- Calling friends or family on the phone
- Increasing contact with existing acquaintances and friends
- Renewing or beginning involvement in church, synagogue, or other religious group activities
- Getting involved with a support group or in community activities

### Connecting with Others – Giving Social Support

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You can help family members and friends cope with the situation by spending time with them and listening carefully. Most people recover better when they feel connected to others who care about them. Some people choose not to talk about their experiences very much, and others may need to discuss their experiences. For some, talking about things that happened can help them seem less overwhelming. For others, just spending time with people one feels close to and accepted by, without having to talk, can feel best. The next page contains some information about giving social support to other people.

## Reasons Why People May Avoid Social Support

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- Not knowing what they need
- Feeling embarrassed or weak
- Feeling they will lose control
- Not wanting to burden others
- Doubting it will be helpful, or that others won't understand
- Having tried to get help and felt that it wasn't there before
- Wanting to avoid thinking or feeling about the event
- Feeling that others will be disappointed or judgmental
- Not knowing where to get help

## Good Things to Do When Giving Support

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- Show interest, attention, and care
- Find an uninterrupted time and place to talk
- Be free of expectations or judgments
- Show respect for individuals' reactions and ways of coping
- Acknowledge that this type of stress can take time to resolve
- Help brainstorm positive ways to deal with their reactions
- Talk about expectable reactions to disasters, and healthy coping
- Believe that the person is capable of recovery
- Offer to talk or spend time together as often as needed

## Things that Interfere with Giving Support

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- Rushing to tell someone that he/she will be okay or that they should "get over it"
- Discussing your own personal experiences without listening to the other person's story
- Stopping the person from talking about what is bothering them
- Acting like someone is weak or exaggerating because he or she isn't coping as well as you are
- Giving advice without listening to the person's concerns or asking the person what works for him or her
- Telling them they were lucky it wasn't worse

## Summary

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Connecting with others and giving and receiving social support are very beneficial actions that help people recover from traumatic events. See the companion factsheets entitled, "**When Terrible Things Happen, What You May Experience—What Helps and What Doesn't,**" "**Information for Families,**" and "**Caring For Yourself in the Face of Difficult Work.**"