



EARTHQUAKE POST TRAUMA STRESS MANAGEMENT

HOW TO SUPPORT FAMILY MEMBERS AND FRIENDS

The tragedy on 12th May, 2008 by the most powerful earthquake in 30 years has brought much death, injury and destruction. It was traumatic to victims as well as witnesses to this unexpected disaster. The care and support you give at this time can be very helpful and appreciated. The following information may be helpful to guide you to support the affected people.

INFORMATION SHEET:

Whether a person personally experiences or witnesses a traumatic event that involves actual or threatened death or injury, he/she is likely to develop unusually strong emotional reactions. **It is important to know that these reactions are Normal reactions to an Abnormal or traumatic event.**

These reactions may sometimes interfere with the ability to function either during the event or later. They may appear immediately after a traumatic event, a few hours or even days later. For some, it they may even take weeks or months to surface.

Depending on the severity of the event, these stress reactions may last anywhere from a few days to a few months or longer. With proper support and understanding, these stress reactions usually pass more swiftly. It is important to seek help early from professional counselors. Such assistance does not imply “weakness” or “craziness”, - it just means that the event was too powerful for the person to manage by him/herself.

Common signs and signals of stress reaction include:

Physiological or Bodily Stress Reactions

- Rapid or Irregular Heartbeat and Palpitation
- Shortness of breath, sweating
- Increased blood pressure
- Shaking, dizziness, tremors or restlessness
- Muscle tension
- Headache
- Nausea, stomach distress and/or Diarrhea
- Frequent urination
- Poor or interrupted sleep
- Disturbances to menstrual cycle
- Change in sexual functioning
- Loss of appetite
- Tiredness
- Teeth grinding



Emotional Stress Reactions-

- Feeling anxious and worried
- Feeling Fearful and tearful
- Feeling helpless & guilty
- Disbelief, denial or bargaining
- Irritability, agitation and anger
- Mood changes and depression
- Lacking in emotional responsiveness - shock, numbness
- Feeling detached from others & showing a restricted range of affect (e.g. inability to show love or kindness)
- Feeling hopeless, insecure

Perceptual & Cognitive-

- Reduced awareness of surroundings (e.g. in a daze)
- Poor concentration, forgetfulness and confusion
- Perceiving things as unreal or as unrelated to self
- Experiencing repeated images related to the trauma like nightmares, illusions, flashbacks or intrusive thoughts
- Inability to recall an important aspect of the trauma
- Difficulty making decision or solving problems
- Heightened alertness and being easily startled by sounds or movements
- Sense of foreshortened future (e.g. does not expect to have a career, marriage, children, or a normal life span)

Behavioral-

- Not wanting to be around people, keeping to self
- Avoidance of activities, places or people that remind them of the trauma
- Lack of interest or lowered participation in activities
- Increase in suspiciousness, negativity, blaming others
- Increased smoking or drinking



HOW YOU CAN BE OF HELP:

1. **Listen** to them attentively without judging their reactions.
2. **Do not** talk them out of their feelings. You can tell them you are sorry such an event has occurred and that you want to understand and assist them.
3. **Do not** minimize their experience. Do not make false promises or suggest “everything will be O.K.”
4. **Ask** what you can do to help the person feel safe. Often, people who have experienced a traumatic event can feel vulnerable and uncertain about their safety.
5. **Ask** what else you can do that he/she would consider helpful. As much as possible help him/her with everyday tasks.
6. **Respect** their possible need for personal space and private time.
7. **Try not** to take their anger, irritation or other feelings personally.
8. **Encourage** the affected person to seek additional professional assistance from Human Dynamic if the signs of stress you see do not begin to subside within a couple of weeks, or if they intensify.