



## **EARTHQUAKE POST TRAUMA STRESS MANAGEMENT**

### **HELPING CHILDREN COPE AFTER A DISASTER**

The tragedy on 12<sup>th</sup> May, 2008 by the most powerful earthquake in 30 years has brought much death, injury and destruction . If a child is being separated from parents or being exposed to the trauma as a result of the event, s/he may react differently to normal or unexpected events. The following information may be helpful during and following the initial shock and grief.

#### **Symptoms of Posttraumatic Stress**

Parents/care takers should be alert to these signs that indicate your child may be feeling continued stress after traumatic events.

- Refusal to return to school and “clinging behavior
- Shadowing the parents/care takers around the house
- Sleep disturbances such as nightmares, screaming during sleep or bed wetting
- Have problems staying or falling asleep
- Loss of concentration and irritability
- Behavior problems, which are not typical for the child, like misbehaving in school or at home
- Physical complaints (Stomachache, headache, dizziness) for which a physical cause cannot be found
- Withdrawal from family and friends
- Decreased activity
- Preoccupation with the events
- Acting younger than their age

#### **Feelings of the Stressed Child**

Following a traumatic event, your child may be:

- agitated or overactive
- confused
- afraid
- angry
- sad
- nervous or anxious
- scared
- guilty
- withdrawn
- afraid to be alone
- avoiding situations or places that remind them of the trauma
- having trouble believing the trauma happened .



### **Listen to Your Child**

These are questions to ask children that are directly or indirectly involved in trauma to determine their awareness, knowledge, needs and misconceptions.

- Where were you at the time of the event?
- What happened where you were?
- How did it happen?
- Why did it happen?
- What were your thoughts and feelings – then and now?
- What did you do to help yourself - then and now?
- What did others do to help you - then and now?

### **Helping Your Child Cope**

- Answer questions reassuringly but honestly.
- Don't avoid difficult questions.
- Don't be afraid to let your child talk about the event.
- Listen to your child's views of the events at the time of the disaster and about the events that followed.
- Ask open ended questions so he/she can express feelings about these events.
- Reassure them that they are safe. Let your child know you love them and know how they may be upset.
- Help your child know what will happen.
- Help care takers tell your child what they are doing to care for them if your child is injured.
- Try to limit activities that may cause anxiety such as television news, scary movies or stories.