

# Guidelines for Trauma Recovery

There are several things you can do to help counter traumatic impact and lessen the likelihood of developing PTSD (a long term situation of Post-Traumatic Stress):

- **Calm and being calm:** This is not denying, ignoring, or dismissing what's happening, but rather, being still amid the tumultuous circumstances. By the way, singing has been proven as a way to calm a child or an adult or even a group fairly quickly. When we sing songs, our heart rates and breathing get in sync with one another.
- **Connect:** Get together with your neighbors and loved ones on a regular basis. Being with people who care about you and who you care about lifts the spirit and gets all the agency hormones (serotonin, cortisol, etc.) going in good ways.
- **Communicate:** Express what's happened and where to get useful resources. This doesn't necessarily have to be with words; such things as art, dance, lighting candles or even crying on someone's shoulder all are forms of communicating what's happened. Coming together in prayer, silent meditation or worship can be a very moving way to communicate, especially when people feel they have no words.

Some important "mantras" to keep in mind in disaster response:

- **The Survivor is the Expert:** Never force anyone to do anything; really listen to them and let them find their own pace in healing.

- **"It's the Disaster Talking":** For the first thirty days or so--which is the amount of time a human body generally takes to cycle through trauma related hormones--"anything goes". People don't eat well, they don't sleep well, they're irritable, they're angry, they're hypervigilant and startle easily, they cry a lot, they don't cry, they don't feel like themselves. During these weeks, while they feel out of sorts, they don't have good control over themselves and say things they don't mean or later wish they hadn't. Providing the "space" for this kind of "not having it all together" or being "really ugly" can be very meaningful for people. Patience for them and for yourself is a wonderful asset. If possible, limit your time watching TV or social media coverage of the event(s); even for those who did not experience the actual event, "vicarious trauma" can set in.
- **Disaster Recovery and Rebuilding:** It tends to take about two years and it's a long-haul. You can encourage all to pace themselves, to be kind to themselves and to be patient with others—and don't forget yourself. Each day brings its own particular set of issues; among them frustration, grief, anger; perhaps even depression. When in doubt, encourage others to seek out something nourishing.

We often talk about the resiliency of the human spirit to overcome just about anything. But it is very difficult to do it on your own. Don't be afraid to ask for help—professional or otherwise. Just sitting down for a conversation with a friend about what happened and how you feel can do wonders for the soul. Keep moving toward patience, kindness and love.