

FOR FAMILY AND FRIENDS

- Understand that your loved one may be trying to figure out their own thoughts, feelings, and reactions, and may not know exactly what they need or want at times.
- Listen carefully without offering advice. Don't try to "fix" them, or the situation. They need to go through these thoughts and feelings to recover. Avoid "it could have been worse" type comments and "cheer-up" messages.
- Try not to tell your loved one how they "should" feel. Instead, try to acknowledge what they say they do feel. You don't have to understand any or all of it, just let them know you heard it.
- Don't push your loved one to talk. They may initially prefer talking to someone else: remember, they may be trying to shield you, not shut you out.
- It can help to just say, "I can see this is hard" or "I'm so sorry" or "I care about you" or "I want to understand".
- Don't try to analyze behaviors you observe. Acceptance and support are the most comforting things you can give. This does not mean tolerating anti-social or self-destructive behavior. It does mean realizing that people react to abnormal events in very individual ways, some that even they cannot expect or predict. Most of these reactions are normal, even if they are not usual for your loved one. With the right kind of help and support, they do diminish over time.
- Be honest with your loved one if you observe something that truly frightens you.
- Reactions and moods at this time can change without warning. If you expect the unexpected, you can stay flexible.
- Don't take anger or other negativity personally, at least for the short term.
- Let your loved one set the pace for what they want and need. They may want lots of contact, they may want little or none. Try to focus on what they are comfortable with, rather than your own curiosity or anxiety. Let them do what they can.
- Try to stay sensitive to how your loved one feels about physical contact. A caring touch may be comforting, but they may also prefer if you just stay quietly nearby.
- Create a safe haven at home. Make sure that they have quiet time and privacy.
- Offer to go for a walk with them, especially outdoors.
- Offer assistance and options, and remember that even if they are refusing, that's helping them feel more in control.
- Keeping as much as possible to normal routines is valuable support in reconnecting with normal life after an abnormal event.
- Don't forget to keep taking good care of yourself. Reach out for help: you don't have to handle this alone. Make sure you, too, have someone safe to talk to.
- Keep supportive contact as time goes by. Recovery from a critical incident can continue long after everyone else has moved on with life. Milestones, media coverage, unexpected associations, anniversary dates, may activate memories and even reactions. This, too, is normal.