

Family Coping Strategies

by Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health

Talk about the event.

Encourage family members to describe what they: Saw . . Heard . . . Thought . . . Smelled . . . Felt . .

- Be supportive and non-judgmental.
- Get and give information.
 - Discuss factual information about what caused the disaster. Talk about the earthquakes, hurricanes, tornadoes, etc.
 - Share about recent changes in your lives. This helps everyone know what is happening and what to expect.
- Maintain crucial standards with children but be more flexible with less important expectations.
- Be flexible with roles and chores.
- Set priorities and problem solve with input from family members.
- Allow time to heal. Give yourself and your family time to heal at their own pace. Think of healing as a family issue not an individual one.
- Give and ask for support from family members, friends and the community.
- Review emergency preparedness. Improve those areas that need some attention and family practice drills.
- Laugh. Use humor. Try to lighten up if you can.
- Be more tolerant. Give each other space.
- Validate each other:
 - Give hugs.
 - Tell each other how much they are appreciated.
 - Offer praise.
- Use rituals. Rituals are symbolic events that can support and aid growth and healing. Rituals can help the family in the healing process and reaffirm family bonds. As an example, one family who lost their home in a fire filled balloons, each representing something they lost in the fire. The family gathered in a circle at the site of their home and said a few words about what each item meant and then released the balloons in the air.
- After some time has passed, review what has happened with your family. Concentrate on how each person has changed or grown.
- Take time to do fun things.