

In Times of National Tragedy



5 Ways to Help People with AAC Needs Cope

Presume Competence: When exposed to a tragic event, even indirectly through the experiences of parents or exposure via the media, everyone perceives & processes it on some level. This is true even for people with very significant disabilities & those who communicate in less conventional ways.

How We Can Help

1. Stay calm & in control, as best you can.
2. Be proactive. Look for signs of stress & anxiety.
3. Use calming strategies & visual supports.
4. Make language visual. Use communication boards or other visual supports to talk about what is going on.
5. Label & describe what the person may be experiencing.
6. Provide reassurance that everything will be okay. Tell them that there are people helping those in need.
7. Explain things in developmentally appropriate terms, focusing on the things that are of most concern to them. E.g., "Mom's sad because something bad happened to some nice people. You didn't do anything wrong. She's crying because she feels sorry for the people who got hurt."
8. Allow people to express negative emotions & support them in doing so, if necessary. Help them understand that you accept them no matter how they are feeling.
9. Limit exposure to media.
10. Try to spend some extra time together.

Resources: [Talk Sense-Communication & Loss](http://bit.ly/T2CijX) (<http://bit.ly/T2CijX>); [Helping Children with Developmental Disabilities Cope with Traumatic Events](http://bit.ly/T2CGPF) (<http://bit.ly/T2CGPF>); [Helping Children with Cognitive Disabilities Cope with Disasters](http://bit.ly/T2CHD3) (<http://bit.ly/T2CHD3>); NASP (<http://bit.ly/UKcOBv>)

