



## King County

### In the Aftermath of the Haitian Earthquake

*On January 12, a magnitude 7.0 earthquake struck Haiti, affecting some 3 million lives and destroying most of the capital, Port-au-Prince. We would like to offer our condolences to those who have lost loved ones or are unable to reach out to loved ones at this time.*

*To locate a U.S. citizen living or traveling in Haiti, contact the U.S. Department of State, Office of Overseas Citizens Services, at 888-407-4747 or 202-647-5225. If you are worried about a loved one, or know someone who is, we offer some coping strategies to help you at this difficult time. And remember, professional help is available.*

When a tragedy strikes, many people who are not directly affected by the events want to help. But they feel a sense of helplessness because they don't know how to offer assistance.

Some emotions you may feel are fear, horror, anger, confusion and frustration. Guilt, self-blame and shame are also common, including survival guilt, guilt over not being able to help others, guilt over things that "could've been done" but weren't, shame over fears or reactions to fears. Loss, grief and sorrow are also felt for the victims and their families. The important thing is to not let these emotions overcome you. Even if you don't live in the areas affected by the tragedies or know anyone involved, there are ways you can help.

#### **If you are worried about a loved one, or know someone who is**

- Pray for the victims and their families.
- Offer specific types of help to a friend or loved one affected by the tragedy, or ask him how you can help.
- Some parents may be very busy. Offer to spend time with their children to play or to listen to their concerns.
- Sometimes people in trauma say or do things they wouldn't do under normal circumstances. So don't take it personally.
- Offer to accompany the individual to any events associated with the trauma.
- Keep helping. Recovery from the disaster may take a long time. Regular, small acts of kindness are necessary to help friends and family members rebuild their lives.

#### **Listen to friends, co-workers or loved ones who need support**

One of the best ways you can help a person is to listen. Encourage someone to talk about his emotions, but don't force him. Expressing experiences and feelings can help ease the tension, making the situation seem lighter to bear. Reassure the person that it's OK to cry. And be respectful if the person requests some private time. But don't assume the person wants to be alone just because he doesn't seek you out first.

Spend time with the person who has been impacted by the trauma. Often you don't even have to say much—just "being there" for her can be as helpful as anything you might be able to say.

Show your care by your words and actions. A comforting hug or a few words of support and encouragement can help. Kind deeds and expressions of affection or admiration will mean a lot.

If you don't know anyone who was hit by the tragedy, it may be helpful to talk about the events with friends, family, co-workers, a therapist or religious leader. But beware of expressions of violence and anger. It's OK to talk about being angry and hurt, but threatening others with violence will make matters worse and won't reverse the events that occurred.

#### **Respond to the fears of children**

If your child knows that a loved one was directly affected by the tragedy, or has been exposed to the tragedy in some way, she may need some special attention to sort through the information received by your family, school peers and teachers, and especially the television and Internet. According to The Federal Emergency Management Agency, children may show these behaviors after a disaster:

- change from being quiet, obedient and caring to loud, noisy and aggressive or may change from being outgoing to shy and afraid
- develop nighttime fears, have nightmares or bad dreams
- be afraid the event will recur
- become easily upset, crying and whining
- lose trust in adults. After all, their adults were not able to control the disaster.
- revert to younger behavior such as bed wetting and thumb sucking
- not want parents out of their sight and refuse to go to school or child care
- have symptoms of illness, such as headaches, vomiting or fever

FEMA recommends the following to ease children's fears:

- Talk to children about how they are feeling and listen without judgment.
- Let them take their time to figure things out. Don't rush them.
- Help them use words that express their feelings, such as happy, sad or angry.
- Assure them that you will be there to take care of them.
- Stay together as a family as much as possible.
- Let them have some control, such as choosing what outfit to wear or what meal to have for dinner.
- Encourage the children to give or send pictures they have drawn or things they have written.
- Help children regain faith in the future by helping them develop plans for activities that will take place later (e.g., next week, next month).
- Allow children to grieve losses.

## Resources

American Red Cross

Disaster Alert: Earthquake in Haiti

<http://newsroom.redcross.org/2010/01/12/disaster-alert-earthquake-in-haiti/>

U.S. State Department

[www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov)

### *Donations*

American Red Cross

Text "HAITI" to "90999" and \$10 will be given automatically to the Red Cross to support relief efforts in Haiti, charged to your cell phone bill.

Call 800-REDCROSS or 800-257-7575 (Spanish)

Go online to [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)

Center for International Disaster Information

Haiti Earthquake Humanitarian Emergency

<http://www.cidi.org/incident/haiti-10a/>

UNICEF

<http://www.unicef.org/>

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