

CRISIS COUNSELING

**Produced by Redeemer Counseling Services
of Redeemer Presbyterian Church in
New York City in response to the traumatic
events of September 11th.**

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COMPASSION FATIGUE

The Golden Rule will protect caring leaders from Compassion Fatigue. Please consider the following fatigue-related facts:

- A disaster creates demands beyond the normal community/individual resources
- A disaster may generate a cluster of conflicting emotional responses such as guilt, anger, gratitude, depression, and anxiety
- Physical symptoms may include: fatigue, headaches nausea, muscle pain, dizziness
- Cognitive symptoms include: concentration problems, decision-making problems, disoriented thinking
- Behavioral symptoms, include: insomnia, crying easily, addictions such as nicotine, caffeine, alcohol, and obsessive behavior
- Facing a tragedy intensifies and magnifies pre-existent emotional/trauma conditions
- Understanding personal limits and appropriate role/response is important
- Monitor your own reactions to others' pain
- Community/Group support and individual counseling may be needed

PREVENTING COMPASSION FATIGUE

- Set healthy boundaries for your family, marriage and work relationships.
- Learn how to say NO.
- Find rewarding professional activities
- Avoiding exposure to chaotic situations and relationships
- Balanced cycle of rest, work and recreational activities
- Eating good balanced meals
- Develop realistic expectations about the rewards and hazards of helping people
- Share work responsibilities with others

FAMILY COPING STRATEGIES

Do allow family members to express as much grief as they are feeling at the moment and are willing to share.

- Talk about the event
- Encourage group/family members to describe their emotional pictures of the disaster
- Facilitate interaction and a supportive environment
- Avoid divine judgment statements
- Share how the disaster has changed your views of life, meaning and priorities
- Explore how tragedy reveals human compassion and solidarity
- Allow individual healing to take place
- Express appropriate physical expression of care
- Express your sorrow
- Respect space for private grief
- Be willing to accept the transitional unfairness of life
- Do allow them to be patient with themselves, not to impose any “should” on themselves

RESPONDING TO ANGER

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. ~Romans 21:1,2,4 (NIV)

Seven Strategies for Releasing Anger Through Bold Prayer

1. Pray for city renewal through new partnerships of love, holiness, truth and missions.
2. Pray for a radical commitment to gospel communication for the redemption of many people of different nationalities.
3. Pray for spiritual formation through the transformation of our desires and priorities.
4. Pray for a new vision of power and leadership based upon humility and compassion.
5. Pray for peace making, reconciliation and understanding among different races and cultures as an alternative to political and religious hatred.
6. Pray for family renewal through a renewed covenant of love and integrity.
7. Pray for genuine care and solidarity with those who are grieving the loss of their loved ones, and who are facing the uncertainties of life.

RESPONDING TO FEAR

We Grieve Alone, but We Heal in Community.

God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not fear, even if earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea. Let the oceans roar and foam. Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge! A river brings joy to the city of our God, the sacred home of the Most High. God Himself lives in that city; it cannot be destroyed... ~Psalm 46:1-5 (NLT)

Seven Strategies to Replace Fear with Bold Faith

1. Do not allow prophetic speculations or manifestations of evil distract your mind from the work of building God's Kingdom in your home, church and communities.
2. Exercise bold faith. Faith is the refusal to panic. (Dr. Timothy Keller)
3. Follow your fears to find your idols. Identify them, confess them and replace them.
4. Define your priorities in light of the eternity view of life.
5. Build your character, plans and dreams upon the Lord.
6. Fear God and don't be afraid of those who can kill only the body.
7. Work and pray to restore the body and the soul of the area(s) affected by the traumatic event(s).

HELPING KIDS TO COPE

Don't assume that they aren't experiencing trauma.

- Empathic communication
- Talk to kids about a perfect creation
- Talk to kids about obedience and disobedience
- Talk to kids about the Fall of Humanity
- Talk about the reality of good and evil
- Talk about the triumph of goodness over evil
- Evil cannot be explained
- God is not the author of evil
- Goodness has been revealed in Christ
- God is good
- Talk to kids about human recovery at the Cross
- Talk about God's commitment to humanity
- Spend extra bedtime with your kids
- Listen to them
- Pray with them
- Reassure of your love
- Bless them
- Celebrate their lives

APA RECOMMENDATIONS (American Psychological Association)

- Spend more time with children and let them be more dependent on you during the months following the trauma—for example, allowing your child to cling to you more often than usual. Physical affection is very comforting to children who have experienced trauma.
- Provide play experiences to help relieve tension. Younger children in particular may find it easier to share their ideas and feeling about the event through non-verbal activities such as drawing.
- Encourage older children to speak with you, and with one another, about their thoughts and feelings. This helps reduce their confusion and anxiety related to the trauma.
- Respond to questions in terms they can comprehend. Reassure them repeatedly that you care about them and that you understand their fears and concerns.
- Keep regular schedules for activities such as eating, playing and bedtime to restore a sense of security and normalcy.

When to Seek Professional Help

(If any of these distress signals persist longer than 3 weeks, you must do something.)

- Unusual separation anxiety
- Unreasonable fear and morbidity
- Sleep disorders
- Loss of concentration
- Behavioral problems
- Physical symptoms
- Isolation from friends and enjoyable activities
- Hopeless about the future
- Change of eating patterns
- Trouble at school or home

COPING STRATEGIES FOR CHILDREN

1. Reassure children that you help to keep them safe.
2. Turn off the TV. Overexposure to the media can be traumatizing. If your older children are watching the news, be sure to watch with them. [Very likely if anyone in the house is watching the coverage, everyone will. The graphic details burn themselves into a child's memory, heightening their fears.]
3. Be aware that your child's age will affect his or her response. Adolescents in particular may be hard hit by these kinds of events. Obtaining counseling for a child or adolescent soon after a disaster may reduce long-term effects.
4. Calmly express your emotions—remember that a composed demeanor will provide a greater sense of security for your child. [Scripture and prayer can help us regain our composure. Some helpful passages include the following: Psalm 23; 30:5; 33:4; 34:19; 37:23-25; 46:1; 55:22-21.]
5. Let your children ask questions, talk about what happened, and express their feelings. [Kids pick up on adult behavior, sensing that something is wrong. If you don't talk, they will assume that things are worse than they really are. Telling stories about the heroes who unselfishly serve others during or after a tragedy inspires selflessness, hope and courage in children.]
6. Play with children who can't talk yet to help them work out their fears and respond to the atmosphere around them. [Building with blocks can give children a chance to play out what they think happened. Question them as they play to clarify what they know and think. Correct their misperceptions. Painting pictures also can be therapeutic for children.]
7. Consider how you and your child can help. Children are better able to regain their sense of security if they feel they can help in some way. Give them a choice of activities such as:
 - Write a letter to someone—God, a leader, the foe, a survivor.
 - Make a card or poster for one of the above.
 - Draw a picture.
 - Bake cookies for someone who is hurting.
 - Collect money to send to a survivor fund.
 - Have the children give their own donation to a fund.

TALKING WITH CHILDREN

WHEN THE TALKING GETS TOUGH

Wars, shootings in schools, natural disaster, death at sporting events... As adults, we hope that these and other tragic outcomes will never happen anywhere and definitely will not impact the children and youth we care about. We would like to protect those young minds from the pain and horror of difficult situations. We would like to ensure that they have happy, innocent and carefree lives.

So what is a parent, teacher or other caring adult to do when disaster fills the airwaves and the consciousness of society?

- **Don't assume that the kids don't know about it.** They probably know more than you think. The reality of today's world is that news travels far and wide. Adults and children learn about disaster and tragedies shortly after they occur, and live video footage with close-ups and interviews are part of the report. Children and youth are exposed to the events as soon as they can watch TV, use the Internet or interact with others who are consumers of the news. Not talking about it does not protect children. In fact, you may communicate that the subject is taboo and that you are unavailable if you remain silent.
- **Be available and "askable."** Let kids know that it is OK to talk about the unpleasant events. Listen to what they think and feel. By listening, you can find out if they have misunderstandings, and you can learn more about the support that they need. Be careful not to overwhelm them or expect them to find answers for you.
- **Help children use creative outlets like art and music to express their feelings.** Children may not be comfortable or skilled with words, especially in relation to difficult situations. Using art, puppets, music or books might help children open up about their reactions. They may want to draw pictures and then destroy them, or they could want to display them or send them to someone else. Be flexible and listen.
- **Reassure young people and help them feel safe.** When tragic events occur, children may be afraid that the same will happen to them. Some young children may even think that it already did happen to them. If they are not at risk, it is important to let them know that, however, try to be realistic as you reassure them. You can try to support them and protect them, but you cannot keep all bad things from happening to children. You can always tell them that you love them, though. You can say that no matter what happens, your love will be with them. That is realistic, and often that is all the children need to feel better.
- **Support children's concern for people they do not know.** Children often are afraid not only for themselves, but also for people they do not even know. They learn that many people are getting hurt or are experiencing pain some way. They worry about those people and for their well-being. In some cases they might feel secure or cared for themselves if they see that others are hurting. It is heartwarming and satisfying to observe this level of caring in children. Explore ways to help others and ease the pain.
- **Look for feelings beyond fear.** After reassuring kids, don't stop here. Studies have shown that children also may feel sad or angry. Let them express that full range of emotions. Support the development of caring and empathy.

- **Help children and youth find a course of action.** One important way to reduce stress is to take action. This true for both adults and children. The action may be very simple or more complex. Children may want to write a letter to someone about their feelings, get involved in an organization committed to preventing events like the one they are dealing with, or send money to help victims or interventionists. Let the young people help to identify the action choices. They may have wonderful ideas.
- **Take action and get involved in something.** It is not enough to let children take action by themselves. Children who know that their parents, teachers or other significant caregivers are working to make a difference, feel hopeful. They feel safer and more positive about the future. So do something. It will make you feel more hopeful too. And hope is one of the most valuable gifts we can give children and to ourselves.
- **Try to keep up your normal family routine:** make sure kids go to school, do their regular after-school activities, keep their bedtime, etc.
- **Be honest**--do not embellish the situation. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so and say you will try to find out the answer.
- **Listen** to the child's fears and assure them that you are there and that they, you and the family are safe.
- **Try not to make any major life changes at this time.**
- **Remember that all the grief/loss and stress is normal for now.**

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AFTERSHOCK

Resources to Handle the Fall-Out

THE TRAUMA

We have all experienced the “aftershock” of major traumatic event that has affected us locally and nationally as well as people all over the world. Because of this trauma, we all will go through our own grief and loss process. This process is natural and necessary. For some, the process will be rapid and for others, the process will take much longer. For some, there is the added trauma of losing friends, neighbors and family members.

We will go through stages of grief and loss. These stage include:

- **DENIAL**—“This is not really happening.”
- **DISBELIEF**—“This is not real”, or “This must be a movie.”
- **ANGER**—“I hate God,” or “I will kill somebody,” or “I will hurt hose responsible.”
- **BLAME**—“If the government only had done this,” or “It was the Army’s fault.”
- **ACCEPTANCE**—“I can’t get through this,” or “I will not let this interfere with my life,” or “I have lost someone and I will never see them again,” or “I have lost my feelings of security, but I will go on.”

The trauma and the grief/loss process causes stress in all of us. The signs and symptoms of stress usually are intense at first and over time lessen. Grief/loss come and go in waves when we are reminded or think of the traumatic event or the loss of someone.

Some of the signs of stress for adults and adolescents are:

- **PHYSICAL**—fatigue, nausea, grinding of teeth, chest pains, sweating
- **IN-THINKING**—confusion, poor attention, poor concentration, nightmares
- **EMOTIONAL**—anxiety, grief, guilt, depression, panic, uncertainty, irritability, fearful, feelings of helplessness and loss of control
- **BEHAVIORAL**—withdrawal, outbursts, loss of or increase in appetite, increased of drug/alcohol consumption, suspiciousness, homicidal, suicidal

For children, the symptoms of stress are similar to ones above, but are usually expressed in their behavior, such as acting out, angry outbursts, crying, lack of attention, and concentration. For some children, they may show answers such as staying in their room or being by themselves and not wanting to go to school or outside to play.

We will all experience some or all of the symptoms of stress following a traumatic event especially as we reminded of the event by watching television, listening to the radio, reading newspapers and in conversation. All of this is normal and to be expected.

RESOURCES OF ASSISTANCE

Some of the things we can do to relieve stress and get through our grief and loss process are:

- Talk with parents, relatives, teachers, religious leaders, physicians, friends, co-workers, etc. This is the time use our support system, just as many of us will be used by others for their support.
- Exercise is one of the most immediate ways to relieve stress.
- Find some relaxation: play games, go fishing, etc. It is helpful to take your mind off the stress/loss/grief for some time each day.
- Try to get plenty of rest. Sleep deprivation will only magnify the stress.
- Eat regularly.
- To feel in control of your life perform as many of your daily life activities as you can: got to work, school, sporting events, cook dinner, etc.