

# Parent Tips

## for Helping **Adolescents** after Disasters



Reactions	Responses	Examples of things to do and say
<b><i>Detachment, shame, and guilt</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide a safe time to discuss with your teen the events and their feelings.</li> <li>Emphasize that these feelings are common, and correct excessive self-blame with realistic explanations of what actually could have been done.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Many kids — and adults — feel like you do, angry and blaming themselves that they couldn’t do more. You’re not at fault — remember; even the firefighters said there was nothing more we could have done.”</li> </ul>
<b><i>Self-consciousness about their fears, sense of vulnerability, fear of being labeled abnormal</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Help teens understand that these feelings are common.</li> <li>Encourage relationships with family and peers for needed support during the recovery period.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“I was feeling the same thing. Scared and helpless. Most people feel like this when a disaster happens, even if they look calm on the outside.”</li> <li>“My cell phone is working again, why don’t you see if you can get a hold of Pete to see how he’s doing.”</li> <li>“And thanks for playing the game with your little sister. She’s much better now.”</li> </ul>
<b><i>Acting out behavior; using alcohol and drugs, sexual acting out, accident-prone behavior.</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Help teens understand that acting out behavior is a dangerous way to express strong feelings (like anger) over what happened.</li> <li>Limit access to alcohol and drugs.</li> <li>Talk about the danger of high- risk sexual activity.</li> <li>On a time-limited basis, have them let you know where they are going and what they’re planning to do.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“Many teens — and some adults — feel out of control and angry after a disaster like this. They think drinking or taking drugs will help somehow. It’s very normal to feel that way — but it’s not a good idea to act on it.”</li> <li>“It’s important during these times that I know where you are and how to contact you.” Assure them that this extra checking- in is temporary, just until things have stabilized.</li> </ul>
<b><i>Fears of recurrence and reactions to reminders</i></b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Help to identify different reminders (people, places, sounds, smells, feelings, time of day) and to clarify the difference between the event and the reminders that occur after it.</li> <li>Explain to teens that media coverage of the disaster can trigger fears of it happening again.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>“When you’re reminded, you might try saying to yourself, ‘I am upset now because I am being reminded, but it is different now because there is no hurricane and I am safe.’”</li> <li>Suggest “Watching the news reports could make it worse, because they are playing the same images over and over. How about turning it off now?”</li> </ul>

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<p><b><i>Abrupt shifts in interpersonal relationships:</i></b> <i>Teens may pull away from parents, family, and even from peers; they may respond strongly to parent's reactions in the crisis.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Explain that the strain on relationships is expectable. Emphasize that we need family and friends for support during the recovery period.</li> <li>■ Encourage tolerance for different family member's courses to recovery.</li> <li>■ Accept responsibility for your own feelings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Spend more time talking as a family about how everyone is doing. Say, "You know, the fact that we're crabby with each other is completely normal, given what we've been through. I think we're handling things amazingly. It's a good thing we have each other."</li> <li>■ You might say, "I appreciate your being calm when your brother was screaming last night. I know he woke you up too."</li> <li>■ "I want to apologize for being irritable with you yesterday. I am going to work harder to stay calm myself."</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Radical changes in attitude</i></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Explain that changes in people's attitudes after a disaster are common, but will return back to normal over time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ "We are all under great stress. When people's lives are disrupted this way, we all feel more scared, angry — even full of revenge. It might not seem like it, but we all will feel better when we get back to a more structured routine."</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Wanting premature entrance into adulthood:</i></b> <i>(e.g., wanting to leave school, get married)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Encourage postponing major life decisions. Find other ways to make the adolescent feel more in control over things.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ "I know you're thinking about quitting school and getting a job to help out. But it's important not to make big decisions right now. A crisis time is not a great time to make major changes."</li> </ul>
<p><b><i>Concern for other victims and families</i></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Encourage constructive activities on behalf of others, but do not burden with undo responsibility.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Help teens to identify projects that are age- appropriate and meaningful (e.g., clearing rubble from school grounds, collecting money or supplies for those in need).</li> </ul>