

INFORMATION FOR ADULTS LOOKING AFTER A CHILD OR CHILDREN THROUGH BOMBARDMENT AND SIEGE

This information is for adults who are caring for children during a crisis. You may be their relative, or you may now be looking after a child in the short term in response to the emergency situation you are in. We hope this information will help you.

ABOUT YOU

What might you be experiencing?

- You may feel extremely scared for your safety, the safety of the children in your care and those around you. This may lead to physical reactions such as rapid heartbeat, sweating and difficulty sleeping.
- You may become more irritable than usual, and your mood may change back and forth dramatically. You may be especially anxious or nervous or low.
- You may have repeated and vivid memories of your experiences. These flashbacks may also lead to physical reactions such as rapid heartbeat or sweating.
- You may find it difficult to concentrate or make decisions or become more easily confused. Your sleep and eating patterns may also be disrupted. All these things may affect how you get on with the children you are looking after.

What can you do to help yourself?

- Recognise that this is a challenging time but one that you can work to manage. You have tackled other hardships at other times in your life.
- Recognise that you are a unique person. Use the skills and resources that you have.
- Allow yourself and the children to mourn any losses you may have experienced.
- Try to be patient with changes in how you are feeling.
- Try and keep hopeful and a positive outlook. This will help children have hope for the future.
- Support each other and take help from friends, relatives, community and religious leaders.
- Look after yourself as much as possible and try to rest when you can.
- As much as you can, try to establish or re-establish routines, such as regular bed times.
- If you can, try to keep yourself occupied with activities with others around you.
- Maintain any rituals or religious activities you do.

ABOUT YOUR CHILD

What might your child be experiencing?

How children react to stressful experiences can vary depending on a variety of things, for example their age, but here are some common ways children react:

- Physical complaints such as headache and stomachache.
- Being fearful and anxious.
- Recurrent and troubling recollections of any distressing events.
- Difficulty sleeping, nightmares, night terrors, shouting or screaming.
- Older children may go back to bedwetting, clinging to their parents, frequent crying, thumb-sucking, being afraid to be left alone.
- Becoming unusually active or aggressive or the opposite shy, quiet, withdrawn and sad.
- Difficulty concentrating.

It is important to remember that it is COMMON for children to show stress reactions or problem behaviours during and after frightening and distressing experiences.

What can you do to help children?

SAFETY

- Strive to keep your family together at all times.
- Try hard not to be separated from the children in your care.
- Ensure the children know their name, and where you are staying and how to get help if they are separated from you.
- If you are going to a distribution site either keep children close by at all times or leave them in the care of a responsible and trusted relative or adult.

- If children do go along with you arrange in advance somewhere you can meet if you become separated. Ensure this is somewhere the child will know and feel comfortable.
- If you feel it is safe for your child to join others in play, make sure you know where they are at all times.

PROVIDING WARMTH AND SUPPORT

- Promise that you will do everything you can to care for and protect them.
- Try to be affectionate with your child by often giving them hugs or holding their hand.
- Try to tell them often that you love them. Being caring and telling children that you love them will reassure them.

GIVING PRAISE

- Look for opportunities to praise your child when they have done something good, however small it may seem.
- Try to be patient with children and not to criticise them for changes in their behaviour, such as clinging to you or frequently seeking reassurance.
- Encourage child to help, and praise and thank them when they do. Children cope better and recover sooner when they help others.

SPENDING TIME TOGETHER AND TALKING

- Pay attention to your child. Spend a few moments encouraging them to talk with you.
- Take time to listen to them and try to understand what they have experienced. Ask how they feel about their experiences and what is most stressful and difficult for them now.
- Listen to and accept whatever children feel. Children do better in the long term when they have had a chance to express their feelings.
- Do not promise children things you cannot provide.
- Be open and try to give children accurate information about what is happening.

ENCOURAGING PLAY

- When you can, encourage children to play with you, their siblings or other children. Play is important in helping children work through past and current stress and experiences and to prepare for the future. It helps maintain some normality in their lives.

MAINTAINING A ROUTINE

- When you can, try to maintain everyday routines, such as bedtimes.
- When possible, encourage children to read, write and draw.

BEREAVEMENT

- You, and the children in your care, may be struggling with feelings of grief for people you care about or things you have lost.
- You might immediately feel shock and disbelief at the loss, while also feeling fear and anxiety.
- Children may also be struggling to accept and understand the loss. They may refuse to believe what has happened is real. They can be helped by allowing them to ask questions, encouraging them to talk and write down their feelings, and taking part in rituals and prayers.
- If someone has died, in simple words, tell them the person has died and will not come back.
- Listen to and accept whatever your child feels. Children may seem happy but be sad.
- Let them know it's ok, however they feel.
- It's ok not to have all the answers. Just listening will help children know that you care.

We wish you strength in caring for the children during this challenging time.