



## SUPPORTING OUR SURVIVORS

Being victim to a calamity or disaster can be traumatic. This primer was prepared to provide information for those whose friends, family, students, colleague or employers have experienced disasters. It provides suggests on what you can do to help survivors.

**The first priority is to ensure the safety and providing for their basic needs! Food, shelter, clothing, medicine are essential to making them recover.** However, beyond physical needs, an important first step to is to restore a semblance of normalcy to their lives, even as paradoxically, we acknowledge that “things cannot be the same.”

### Common Responses to Disasters

- Fear
- Difficulty relaxing
- Difficulty making decisions
- Irritability, being startled easily
- Guilt
- Feeling that “no one can understand what I’ve been through
- Need to cling to others
- Confusion
- Difficulty believing what has happened
- Avoiding activities, places, thoughts, or feelings that remind you of the trauma
- Inability to remember important aspects of the trauma
- Loss of interest in activities and life in general
- Feeling detached from others and emotionally numb
- Sense of a limited future
- Excessive alcohol or drug use

**It is important to remember that these post-trauma stress symptoms are NORMAL reactions to an ABNORMAL situation! Survivors are not to blame for their feelings or reactions.**

### WHAT NOT TO DO

**Probe or ask too much.** Don’t force people to talk if they don’t want to. If they forget details, this might be better for them.

**Evaluate, judge or moralize.** The last thing survivors need is to be scolded or blamed.  
“*Sinabihan naman kayo na umalis na kasi mataas na ang tubig...*”  
“*Baka pinaparuasahan ka ni Lord*”

**Minimize the person's situation.** Everyone has the right to grieve for a loss regardless of its magnitude. *“Si Jun nga nasira ang buong bahay, ikaw nawalan ka lang ng laptop.”*

**Try soothing the person.** What people went through was not not easy nor okay. It does not help for you to dismiss it *“Okay lang yan!”*

**Take their behavior personally.** People who go through trauma may change or not respond to help. Don't resent this – they are not themselves. *“Ikaw nga nga tinutulungan... ayaw mo pa.”*

**Rush their grieving process.** Grief is different for everyone and cannot be rushed. *“Get over it.” ”*

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- **Assist them to ensure their safety and attend to their basic needs and help them resume their normal routine**
- **Be available and listen with empathy**
  - Listen to the basic feeling message.
  - Observe other subtle messages that the student uses, whether through body language, gestures, or facial expression.
  - Let the speaker know that you understand what he or she is saying by restating his or her feeling simply and concisely  
*“You lost your home, you are extremely sad about that.”*  
*“You are uncomfortable being a “refugee” in your grandparents’ house”*
- **Assure them that their feelings are normal**  
*“It’s not abnormal right now to feel panicky every time it rains”*
- **Draw out their current coping strategies**  
*“So how are you doing to cope? (Anong ginagawa mo ngayon para malagpasan ito?)”*
- **Recognize their adaptive coping behaviors, strengths or resources**  
*“Napansin ko sa kwento mo na marami pala ang tumutulong sa 'yo, sa pamilya mo, mga kamag-anak, kapitbahay at kaibigan.”*
- **Ask them what other support they may need and help them find resources or help they need**
- **Look out for people at risk and encourage them to talk to a professional**
  - Prolonged of stress beyond say a month or two
  - Inability to function/decrease in performance
  - Those who lost loved ones

*This primer was initially prepared by the Ateneo Department of Psychology for the Psychological Association of the Philippines.*