



Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress

Japanese Earthquake and Tsunami

Care Managers Supporting Families When a Loved One Has Died

The first task of the Care Manager is to establish a supportive “working together” relationship of trust and care. Care Managers are the heart of “taking care of” and not just “giving care to” families who have lost a loved one. Care Managers develop close, collaborative relationships with family members who may be at risk of complicated recovery or needs for treatment.

As you work with your families, remember that grieving is a normal process that typically results in individuals integrating the death of family, friends or loved ones, even under difficult circumstances. In traumatic deaths, there is greater risk for adults and children to have complications in the grieving process. Care Managers should address the needs of their families over the next few weeks while their families reintegrate into their communities.

What questions should I ask in order to understand and help?

- Care Managers should ask the family members to describe their relationship to their loved one.
- Ask the family members how they were notified of the death of their loved one and who notified them.
- Care Managers should ask the family if they believe they are getting the support they need. The presence of friends and other family members may be helpful.
- Ask if there is someone in the family whom they feel is getting in the way of effective grieving.
- Ask the family if a chaplain or other spiritual advisor contact(s) would be helpful.
- Ask each family member if there is anything about this death that really bothers him or her and that they can't stop thinking about. It may be hard to think of their loved one without having very disturbing thoughts about the earthquake and tsunami or what suffering their loved one may have experienced before their death.
- Care managers should be alert to family members who are extremely sad without periods of relief and who are unable to have any sense of hopefulness. This may be an indication that their response is beyond normal expected bereavement.

What do I do for children in the family?

- If there are children in the family, their concerns and questions should be discussed with the parent(s).
- Learn how the child was notified of the death of their loved one.
- Ask what questions the child asked and who answered them.
- Ask the adults if they would like help talking to their child about the death of their loved one. Convey that it is normal to feel that it is sometimes hard to know what to say.
- Advise parents to give information to their child using words the child can understand.
- Care Managers should tell parents that it is important to stay calm, listen carefully, and respond truthfully to questions their children may have.
- Care Managers should use resources available on line to help parents and families talk to their children about death.

**Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress
Uniformed Services University School of Medicine
www.usuhs.mil/csts
301 295-3293**

CSTS is the academic arm and a partnering Center of the Defense Centers of Excellence (DCoE) for Psychological Health and Traumatic Brain Injury.