

## **AFTER A DISASTER: Steps You Can Take To Cope In Stressful Situations**

### **by Los Angeles County Department of Mental Health**

When disasters -- such as earthquake -- strike, families that have suffered loss have experienced the following:

Increased irritability, arguments and family discord, including domestic violence.

Clinging, acting out and regressive behavior by children.

Illness and psychosomatic problems for adults and children.

Exhaustion.

Decreased intimacy.

Increased alcohol consumption and/or substance abuse.

Survivor's guilt.

#### **WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR FAMILY MEMBERS:**

- Listen and empathize. A sympathetic listener is important.
- Spend time with the traumatized person. There is no substitute for personal presence.
- Offer assistance and sympathy. Voiced support is critical.
- Re-assure children, the elderly and even adults: they are safe.
- Don't tell traumatized people that they are "lucky it wasn't worse". Traumatized people are not consoled by such statements. Tell them, instead that you're sorry such an event has occurred, and that you want to understand and assist them.
- Respect a family member's need for privacy and private grief.

#### **WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOURSELF:**

- Physical exercise can help relieve stress. Strenuous exercise alternated with relaxation will help alleviate physical reactions.
- Remember that you're experiencing normal reactions to an abnormal situation.
- Talk to people. Talk is healing medicine.
- Accept support -- from loved ones, friends and neighbors. People do care.
- Give yourself permission to feel rotten. You're suffering from loss. And, it's all right to grieve for the loss of material things. You wouldn't have obtained them or kept them around if they didn't have some meaning to you.
- When you're feeling rotten, remember that those around you are also under stress.
- Don't make any big life changes immediately. During periods of extreme stress, we all tend to make misjudgments.
- Eat well-balanced, regular meals & get rest.
- Be kind to yourself.