



## Talking to Someone Affected By a Natural Disaster

Victims of hurricanes, fires, and other natural disasters may experience intense emotions over the days and weeks that follow. Those affected could wrestle with feelings of sadness, vulnerability, anger or confusion. You may want to provide comfort to someone in such a situation, yet not know exactly what to say. Here are a couple of tips to remember:

- Treat the person with sensitivity
- Offer your support
- Simply listen

When disaster strikes and life is spared but property is destroyed, the right words may be hard to come by. Victims of hurricanes, fires and other natural disasters may experience intense emotions over the days and weeks that follow. The most important thing you can do is to treat victims of natural disasters with sensitivity, and offer them support as they piece their lives back together. Here are a few tips that will help guide the conversation:

### Show sensitivity

- **Acknowledge their feelings.** Let them know that it is OK to feel the way they feel.
- **Give them privacy.** Let them know you're there if they need you.
- **Try not to take any emotional outbursts personally.** Remember, it's not about you. Give them space to collect their thoughts.
- **Respect their changing views.** Recovering from a tragedy may cause a shift in viewpoints or priorities.
- **Offer to help with basic household tasks.** In the wake of a disaster the most basic needs sometimes go unmet. Offer to bring food and water, or to help out with chores around the house.

### Listen before you offer your support

- **Be patient.** Sometimes just being there to listen is enough.
- **Avoid offering unsolicited advice.** It is OK to express your sadness but don't try to fix the situation.
- **Follow their lead.** Don't label the person as a victim or survivor. Listen to see how the person identifies herself/himself.

### Try to avoid the following phrases

Even if you mean well, these responses are often the opposite of comforting after a traumatic event:

- **I know exactly how you feel.**
- **Everything will be fine.**

### Visit

[Ready.gov](http://Ready.gov) to learn how you can improve the readiness and safety of your home and community in the event of an emergency.

### Get

the support you need with no-cost, [confidential non-medical counseling](#) through Military OneSource and the Military and Family Life Counselor Program.

- **It was God's will.**
- **You'll get over it, eventually.**

Avoid making these statements. Instead, offer your support and let them know you are there if they need you.

You will not be able to change what happened, but you can help make life a little easier for someone affected by a natural disaster.