

Providing Emotional Comfort, Care, and Support to Staff, Children, and their Families

Providing emotional support during a flu pandemic is an important way to help people and to show them you care. Formal training is not needed. It is important to provide comfort, address basic needs, encourage self-efficacy (empowerment), and respect an individual's own coping style.

Almost all people need some level of care and support after a disaster. Providing support to staff, children, and their families helps the environment at the center feel safe and calm. And it promotes connectedness to others, self efficacy, and hopefulness.

Staff and Families

Do

- Help people meet their basic needs for food and shelter, and obtain emergency medical attention. Provide repeated, simple, and accurate information on how to get these.
- Listen. Validate feelings and thoughts. Keep in mind there is no wrong or right way to feel, and people from different communities react differently to stress.
- Be friendly, compassionate, and acknowledge how stressful and

difficult things may be during a pandemic.

- Provide accurate information about the flu pandemic or disaster and the response efforts. This will help people to understand the situation.
- If possible, help people connect with others for support (such as backup child care or ideas on learning activities to do at home).
- If you or others are sick, use the phone or e-mail to stay in contact and ask for help if needed.
- Connect people to other support systems, such mental health providers or faith-based support.
- Keep families together. Keep children with parents/guardians or other close relatives whenever possible. (connectedness)
- Suggest practical and realistic strategies that steer people toward helping themselves. (self-efficacy)
 - Instill confidence and ability to cope.
 - Explore past coping strategies. Reinforce strengths and positive coping strategies.
 - Encourage a “one thing at a time” approach.

Providing Comfort, continued

- Engage people in meeting their own needs. (self-efficacy)
- Find out what government and non-government services are available, where they are located, and direct people to those services. (hopefulness)
- If you know that more help and services are on the way, remind people of this when they express fear or worry. (hopefulness)

Don't

- Don't force people to share their stories with you, especially very personal details. (This may decrease calmness in people who are not ready to share their experiences.)
- Don't give simple reassurances like "everything will be okay" or "at least you survived." (Statements like these tend to diminish calmness.)
- Don't tell people what you think they should be feeling, thinking, or doing now. Don't tell them how they should have acted earlier. (This decreases self-efficacy.)
- Don't tell people why you think they have suffered by giving reasons about their personal behaviors or beliefs. (This also decreases self-efficacy.)
- Don't make promises that you or others may not be able to keep. (Broken promises decrease hope.)

- Don't criticize existing services or relief activities in front of people in need of these services. (This may decrease hopefulness or decrease calming.)

Children

During a flu pandemic, one of the most important things you can do for the children at your center is to provide a safe, predictable environment that offers comfort.

Do

- Listen and talk to children about their concerns to help reassure them.
- Allow them to talk about how they have been affected by what is happening around them and how they are feeling. Children react to stress at their own developmental level and stage.
- Create and stick to regular routines.
- If your center has reopened, try to do things as they were done before the center closed.
- Provide extra comfort and reassurance, as needed.
- Set gentle but firm limits for "acting out" behavior.
- Listen to what children have to say.
- Answer questions honestly. (It's important to admit you don't have an answer to a question.)

Providing Comfort, continued

- Discuss positive things, such as being able to come to the center and how people have been sharing and helping one another.
- Let children know that one way they can help is to wash their hands often and well and to cover their coughs and sneezes.
- Allow young children to bring up their feelings and experiences in their own time, and when they feel safe and ready.
 - You may want to use the morning check-in time as an opportunity for children to bring up and discuss their feelings and experiences related to the flu pandemic.
 - You may want to choose an area in the room that offers some privacy for these discussions.
 - Young children often have a hard time finding the words to express their emotions. Instead, ask them to tell you about physical sensations. (You may want to use an outline of a person to help children talk about their physical sensations.)
 - You may want to ask them to draw (or show you) pictures that represent how they feel.
 - If children are able to talk about their emotions, you may want to discuss a range of positive and

negative emotions and let them pick which one they feel.

- Encourage children to express their feeling and emotions during the flu pandemic through activities such as supervised play, drawings, puppet shows, and story telling.

Don't

- Don't dwell on frightening details.
- Don't ask them directly to describe their emotions. (For example, don't ask them if they feel sad, scared, confused, or angry.)
- Do not speak words or emotions on their behalf. (It is not helpful and keeps them from sharing their experience. You may want to ask them to draw, or show you, pictures that represent how they feel.)

Sources:

Psychological First Aid, Field Operations Guide, Second Edition, National Child Traumatic Stress Network, National Center for PTSD

Understanding the Effects of Trauma and Traumatic Events to Help Prevent, Mitigate and Foster Recovery for Individuals, Organizations and Communities, Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress