

Talking With Families During a Crisis

Taking care of yourself first

Taking care of our bodies and minds is essential for overall well-being, and even more critical during times of stress. Taking care of yourself helps you be better prepared to take care of those around you.

**“You can’t
pour from an
empty cup.”**

Continue to:

- ✓ Practice healthy habits (get adequate rest, eat well and be physically active).
- ✓ Take time to do things you enjoy that boost your mood or help you relax (spend time with your family, read a book, meditate or go for a walk).

During times of crisis, it’s normal to feel overwhelmed with strong or uncomfortable emotions. As we encourage our patients and families to be aware of their emotions, we also need to be aware of our own.

Communicating with families during a crisis

Knowing what to say to a family during a crisis can be challenging. You aren’t expected to have all the answers, but here are a few tips for starting the conversation:

- **Encourage families to name what they’re feeling.** Whether it’s anxiety, depression, grief or anger, they need to be able to name the feeling before they can manage it.
- **Normalize and validate their feelings.** Acknowledge the family’s feelings, even if you don’t agree. Let them know it’s normal to feel overwhelmed during times of uncertainty.
- **Avoid minimizing or dismissing their feelings.** As tempting as it may be to provide encouragement (such as “I wouldn’t worry about that” or “I’m sure it will all be fine”), dismissing the fear does not eliminate it; instead, it encourages people to keep their feelings to themselves.
- **Support families in talking to their kids during crisis.** Encourage parents to:
 - Ask** what the child already knows to meet them where they are and not give more information than they can handle.
 - Correct** any misinformation they may hear as best as they can and remind the child there are a lot of rumors and misinformation.
 - Keep** the information they share simple and developmentally appropriate.
 - Remember** that it’s OK not to know all the answers. Listening, itself, can help provide comfort to a child during crisis.
 - Maintain** routines. Keeping regular routines, such as consistent bedtimes and daily physical activity, can help reduce stress and help maintain a sense of comfort, security and normalcy.
 - Use** coping strategies regularly and try different coping strategies to find what works best for them. The coping skills can be as simple as taking a deep breath, going for a walk or playing a game together.