

# Responding After A Tragic Event

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Living through a tragic event in your community can be traumatic and can cause fear and insecurity in places that once felt safe. It can also cause disruption across several areas in life including, but not limited to, housing, health, friendships, customs, church attendance, educational attainment and spiritual security.

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Here are guidelines when responding to those that have experienced such a tragedy in their communities:

1. *Be available, both individually and through your local Christian ministry.* Community tragedies are both private and public and will require action on the individual and group level. Let the community at large know that you are available so that they will feel comfortable approaching you for help.
2. *Appreciate their confidence and be open to understanding their experience.* These events are traumatic and overwhelming. The details of their experience might be unclear. Keep in mind that each person could have experienced the same tragedy differently. Being open to understanding their experience without judgement could be key in calming them down and looking ahead.
3. *Listen before planning or problem solving.* Allow them to share their experience before moving to the problem-solving phase. Asking questions like: “Would you like to tell me how you’re doing?” creates a safe place for the person to speak freely about what is pressuring them the most.
4. *Be ready to grieve.* Community tragedies carry with them deep sadness and anxiety. Be open to sitting in their period of grief and confusion. Be aware that during these periods, an empathic word, a look of comfort and your quiet presence may be what is most helpful.
5. *Think practically and be ready with useful resources.* Depending on the specific circumstance, you may be able to offer meaningful assistance in practical ways. Having ready referrals in the community and its surrounding environs can help the person practically (e.g. housing department, Emergency Management, school

placements, shelters, hospitals, funeral homes, stores that donate clothing, food, etc.). Offering help with everyday activities is a simple way of building unity in the community (e.g. getting groceries, walking the dog, picking up mail).

6. *Consider practical ways your church can help your community and then take action.* Churches can offer a great deal of practical support and comfort to communities following times of tragedy. Once you get a sense for the kind of help your community needs, begin thoughtfully organizing and reach out intentionally (e.g. informal group activities, organizing fundraising, community volunteering / time banking) to build supportive connections through social interactions.
7. *Remember to take a break after helping them and turn to your own support group.* Helping those in crisis is difficult and can be traumatic for the helping person. Take time to debrief with others that can support you as you travel with this person.