GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DEPARTMENT OF MENTAL HEALTH

TIPS FOR HANDLING THIS CRISIS

Everyone reacts to disasters differently. Some of us will seem to have no unusual reaction, others will be frightened, sad, worried or agitated. Do not expect that you will or should react in any particular way or that something is wrong with you if you don't react the same way as your family members or friends.

Some common reactions to learning about a terrorist attack include:

- Wanting to talk about it. People may want to talk about when they first saw it on TV or what happened to them; they may want to talk about it repeatedly.
- Feeling numb or having no upset feelings. Sometimes people seem to "shut down" for a while after a disaster.
- Getting angry and wanting revenge. Sometimes people feel violated and want action. Usually these feelings lessen with time.
- Having trouble sleeping or having nightmares. People may have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep.
- Wanting to move—pace, run, play. It is often hard to sit still. Children especially may need to move about.

What should you do?

- It helps to be with friends and/or family and to talk about what happened.
- It helps to talk about your feelings.
- Spend time doing other things besides watching the news.
- It is helpful to understand some of the details about what happened and to understand what the chances are that it could happen again.
- Seek professional help if the problems persist or are severe. The Department of Mental Health has counselors available between 8 a.m. and 9 p.m. at these sites: Northwest Family Center, 1536 U Street, N.W., 3rd Floor, 673-2042; Community Services Agency, 35 K Street, N.E., 442-4100; and Child and Family Therapy- S.E. Center, 3861 Alabama Avenue, S.E., 645-3600.
- Seek mental health crisis services through the Comprehensive Psychiatric Emergency Program for adults, 202-673-9319 (24 hours), and the Central Intake Division for Children and Youth, 202-673-9040 (weekdays, from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., call CPEP at other times); both are located at 1905 E Street, S.E., Building 14, first floor.

- Consult your minister or spiritual advisor(s).
- Volunteer at a local crisis center or become a blood donor.
- Do not harbor resentment against another cultural or ethnic group.

How can you help your children?

- Be with them and reassure them that you will be there or that a responsible adult will look after them
- Encourage them to talk about their experiences and feelings, but respect their wishes not to talk. Listen to their stories, even if they are repeated over and over.
- Share your experience with them. It may "normalize" their own reactions.
- Seek professional advice if the problems persist or are severe.
- Monitor the amount of television coverage of the attack your children watch.
- Younger children (1-4 years old) should be shielded from media coverage.
- Call the Crisis Phone Center, a joint operation of the Department of Mental Health and DC Public Schools: children's questions will be answered by calling (202) 442-7699; adults' questions will be answered by calling (202) 442-5674. The Crisis Phone Center is staffed today until 9 p.m. and Thursday and Friday (September 13 and 14) from 5 p.m. until 9 p.m.