

SOURCE LINES

THE ASIAN TSUNAMI



How does one go about writing or talking about a tragedy of the magnitude of the South Asian Tsunami? This is an event outside almost any normal human experience!

It is one of those world events where words really fail to describe the horror of the situation

and the pictures, over time, exhaust our emotions. The outpouring of assistance initiated by the population in many countries has driven the response of their governments. Governments are running to keep pace with their citizens.

I believe that the individual responses of ordinary Canadians and other citizens of the world speak volumes about the humanity and caring we all share regardless of our race, religion or nationality.

I can't imagine the feelings of loss for loved ones confirmed dead by the disaster. I do however have first hand experience of a loved one in the region and not knowing their fate for three days. In my case, a daughter in Indonesia, but our story ended happily. Those three days of not knowing, I would wish on no one! Unfortunately not all stories ended as happily as ours did.

So what can we say or do for fellow employees who may not know the fate of loved ones and friends? Really all we can do is simply **listen** – if they wish to talk—with compassion and accep-

tance to their thoughts and feelings. Remember, it is never useful to minimize a person's feelings or experiences or pretend that we know "just how they feel". Practically, depending upon our relationship with the person, we can be most useful by doing things like running errands, shoveling their snow, cooking some food, babysitting etc. These are very helpful activities so that the person can either be on the phone or e-mailing and attempting to get whatever information they can.

For those of you **experiencing the trauma first hand** understand that when something horrible like this happens we are all overwhelmed and often left with feelings of helplessness, powerlessness and not really knowing what to say or do.

Some of the **immediate effects** of this type of trauma:

- **Shock** – including numbed emotions, memory disturbances, confusion, panic, feelings of unreality, anger, sudden tears, feeling out of control, trouble concentrating
- **Denial** – this helps initially to reduce fear and helplessness to manageable levels
- **Unwanted thoughts** - troublesome dreams, seeing the world as unsafe and unfair, old trauma memories may be triggered
- **Hyper-arousal** – trouble sleeping, heightened vigilance, easily startled, wary, increased anxiety
- **Physical Symptoms** – stomach aches,

headaches, menstrual problems

- **Thoughts on the Inevitable** – survivors spend time imagining how things could have been different - think a lot about being lucky – often with much guilt
- **Negative Coping** – substance abuse, controlling behaviour, suicidal ideation or chronic depression

If necessary seek out help from a professional you are comfortable with such as a religious leader, your EAP counsellor, your doctor, etc. Don't let negative coping take over!



Rightly, this disaster has been and will continue to be all over the media so the obvious question we hear is **“What do we say to our children?”**. I know UNICEF has put together a

module for teachers and the local school boards. But obviously our children will be looking for primarily guidance from their parents and loved ones.

So what should we do?

Children can sense your emotions, so be honest about how you feel about what has happened. This allows them to express their feelings. We can role model how to deal with feelings. During these difficult times children need extra attention and affection – give them lots. This will be a learning experience for your child, so respond to their questions and discuss death in a truthful, straightforward, age appropriate way. Older children need to deal with the truth. Assist your child with active expression of feelings through letter writing, story telling, drawing or any activity with which your child feels comfortable.

Younger children – under 5 – should have reinforced that they are safe with mom and dad and that the wave can't hurt them. This will help them settle. Expect the possibility of some nightmares

At work we need to show each other this same compassion and acceptance around this disaster, since all of us will be involved in it differently depending on our closeness to events. It is OK to ask a coworker how they are doing if they seem distracted or far off – again listen (if they want to talk) and make sure they are safe.

This short newsletter can't in any way answer everybody's concerns about themselves, their children or family members so if you have any questions or need assistance please call us at anytime. Remember with something this horrible **“there are no medals for bravery”**.

**Source Line Phone Numbers are:
416-234-1316 or 1-800-394-8015**

Apotex has set up a matching-dollar-for-employee-dollar contribution to the Canadian Red Cross. They do great work. I hope we all can contribute.

Remember - we are all on this small earth - together! Let's try to keep that front and centre in our thoughts and behaviour.



written by Ron Sparrow

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