

Responding to customers affected by a disaster or emergency

People that have been through a disaster take their cue from how others are reacting. By being calm and clear thinking, you help survivors feel that they can rely on you.

What to do

- Before walking up to a customer, take three long deep and even breaths. When you breathe in, your abdomen expands. When you breathe out, your abdomen contracts. This both calms you and keeps you calm when you approach someone to speak with them.
- Remember to speak softly and calmly.
- Introduce yourself: *Hi, my name is _____ . Can I help you find what you are looking for?*
- If the person begins to speak about their experience, or starts to cry, calmly listen while they express their worry or concern.

What to say

- It's important to acknowledge their loss in suitable way to give a sense of support, compassion, and understanding.
- It's okay to say, *I'm so sorry for your loss* and to repeat your offer to help them find what they are looking for.
- Be clear about your job, and what you are able to help with. For example, you could say: *I'm so sorry for your loss; I can help you find anything in the store. If you need help, please let me know.*

What NOT to say

- *I know how you feel.*
- *Let's talk about something else.*
- *You're strong enough to deal with this.*
- *It could be worse.*
- *At least you're still alive.*
- *You need to relax.*

Coping with emotional situations

- When speaking with someone who is upset, you may find that your heart is beating fast, you're sweating, or you may feel like crying: slow your breathing by taking two slow, deep, even breaths.
- After helping a customer affected by a disaster, take time to "check-in" with yourself: Are you feeling sad, anxious, or stressed after you've helped a person affected by a disaster?
- If you feel yourself reacting to a survivor's stress, know that this is normal. Take care of yourself in the same way that you would if you yourself had gone through the disaster yourself.
- Know the signs of stress and take care to keep yourself calm. All the things you can do to help yourself stay calm will be helpful to any survivor.
- To help you manage your own emotions when dealing with someone affected by a disaster, make sure you take care of yourself; don't consume too much caffeine and sugar, eat regular meals, and drink enough water.

For information and resources about responding to, and recovering from a disaster or emergency, visit <http://www.albertahealthservices.ca/news/Page13075.aspx> or call Health Link at 811 or the Mental Health Help Line at 1-877-303-2642