

## Tips for Administrators

There will be lots we come to know as we begin to integrate these displaced children into the schools, but there are some generalities we can expect.

- The loss of control the parents and children have experienced will mean that it may take a long time for them to have a sense of trust. Provide them many opportunities and many different ways to let you know what they think, what they need, what they want.
- We all grieve and adjust with people who are from our own culture. Provide lots of support people who are of the same cultural mix as those who arrive. Provide some training sessions for those support people ahead of time that will help them know what to expect and have ideas on how to listen and support.
- Psychological trauma brings with it a biochemistry that pre-disposes people to anxiety, irritability, aggression and anger. This adrenaline - based reaction makes it difficult to tolerate the sense of having no control. Give people as many opportunities as possible to make their own decisions, to have the opportunity to have control over their lives.
- Parents may not want to separate from their children. In some responses, schools have provided a special room for parents who don't want to leave the school. Their presence in the classroom changes the feel of the room and whether and how students pay attention to the teachers, so it is helpful to provide an alternative place. After 9/11 many schools in Manhattan provided a "parent coffee" in the cafeteria that started right as school started. This also gave parents a chance to talk together about how to help their children continue to adjust. Provide support people who will contribute to the conversation and who will help build a sense of trust with the parents. Kids will only trust the school to the degree that their parents do. This might be a good place for some hand-picked parents to reach out to those who have been displaced.
- Consider whether having parents from the shelter who have children in your school having their own spokespersons -- a small group that represent them all -- to give you feedback on a regular basis. Let them figure out how to decide who they want and how they'd like to keep that avenue of communication open. Certainly all parents will be welcome to come to the school and share their concerns, but having a means for them all to feel represented on a regular basis might be helpful.
- Use student assemblies and other opportunities to help all students gain a sense of belonging to the school. This also provides a time for displaced students to see others from their group coping and participating.
- Staff at the school will benefit from times to gather in small groups or as a whole staff to look at what is working and what isn't. Check in with them informally and at staff meetings, and make a point of asking what insights they've gained and what needs they have.



- Expect that there may be lots of illness and some school phobia on the part of students. The aftermath of trauma -- especially over the next year or so -- leaves people vulnerable to illness. It is also one way that some people take breaks.
- Give staff extra support. Encourage staff, parents and students to exercise good self-care. Adults are only as much help to children as they are to themselves. Children can only do as well as their parents, teachers and care-givers are doing. Stress self-care. That, of course, means you as well.
- Engage community groups in providing support, diversion, entertainment or in being involved in other helpful and appropriate ways.
- Encourage teachers to lead discussions in classrooms, to have activities that help students belong and that help students express what they've been through. Often they can't use words because what happened is so horrific, but they will be able to draw pictures, make murals, or create plays that have indications of hope for the future. We will continue to bring new ideas to schools on these and other steps that will help.
- Special support will be available for counselors in these buildings as well. If counselors provide support groups for these youth, it will be important to include adults who reflect the cultural make-up of the group who are participating in these groups as well. We will be providing guidelines and ideas for activities and discussion topics and techniques for counselors. Your school counselors already have a wealth of knowledge and skill to bring, but the circumstances at this point may bring unexpected or unusual challenges, so ongoing support for them will be important.
- Schools all over the US are asking what they can do. Consider whether you'd be willing for another school to "adopt" your school, sending posters for the walls, doing fundraising or other activities that would be support. For some of the students from the Gulf Coast, it might be a nice connection for those who wish to have pen pals in places close to where they lived.
- As administrators, you are the most apt to do the least about taking good care of yourselves. You got to where you are by working longer hours, taking on greater responsibility, and doing whatever needed to be done for the whole building or system. This is a time to really focus on giving yourself breaks and collegial support.
- Psychological trauma brings with it a whole host of behaviors and challenges. Traditional counseling is often counter-productive for students who are having active symptoms (flashbacks and nightmares). Traditional discipline techniques may escalate some behaviors for some students, yet having discipline and clear expectations and consistent boundaries brings a sense of safety for the students. It would be worthwhile for you and your staff to have a basic understanding of trauma in order to amend some strategies to be more effective.
- Keep letting us know your needs so we can continue to bring new ideas and support.



