



CHILDREN'S REACTIONS TO DISASTER

A disaster, whether community wide or involving only a single family, may leave children especially frightened, insecure, or upset about what happened. They may display a variety of emotional responses after a disaster, and it is important to recognize that these responses are normal.

How a parent reacts will make a great difference in the child's understanding and recovery after the disaster. Parents should make every effort to keep the children informed about what is happening and to explain it in terms that they can understand.

The following list includes some of the reactions you may see in your child:

- Crying/Depression
- Bedwetting
- Thumb-sucking
- Nightmares
- Clinging/fear of being left alone
- Regression to previous behaviors
- Fighting
- Inability to concentrate
- Withdrawal and isolation
- Not wanting to attend school
- Headaches
- Changes in eating and sleeping habits
- Excessive fear of darkness
- Increase in physical complaints

Some things that will help your child recover are:

- Hug and touch your child often.
- Reassure the child frequently that you are safe and together.
- Talk with your child about his/her feelings about the disaster.
 - Share your feelings too. Give information the child can understand.
- Talk about what happened.
- Spend extra time with your child at bedtime.
- Allow children to grieve about their lost treasures; a toy, blanket, lost home.
- Talk with your child about what you will do if another disaster strikes.
 - Let your child help in preparing for future disasters.
- Try to spend extra time together in family activities to begin replacing fears with pleasant memories. If your child is having problems at school, talk to the teacher so that you can work together to help your child.

Usually a child's emotional response to a disaster does not last long. Be aware that some problems may not appear immediately or may recur months after the disaster. Talking openly with your children will help them to recover more quickly from the loss.



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HELPING CHILDREN COPE WITH DISASTER

*Tornadoes ... Fires ... Floods ... Hurricanes ... Earthquakes ... Terrorist Events ...
Disasters may strike quickly and without warning. These events can be frightening for adults, but
they are traumatic for children if they don't know what to do.*

During a disaster, your family may have to leave your home and daily routine. Children may become anxious, confused or frightened. As an adult you'll need to cope with the disaster in a way that will help children avoid developing a permanent sense of loss. It is important to give children guidance that will help them reduce their fears.

As parents we need to decide what's best for our children, but consider using these suggestions as guidelines.

CHILDREN AND THEIR RESPONSE TO DIASTER

Children depend on daily routines: They wake up, eat breakfast, go to school, and play with friends. When emergencies or disasters interrupt this routine, children may become anxious.

In a disaster, they'll look to you and other adults for help. How you react to an emergency gives them clues on how to act. If you react with alarm, a child may become more scared. They see our fear as proof that the danger is real. If you seem overcome with a sense of loss, a child may feel their losses more strongly.

Children's fears also may stem from their imagination, and you should take these feelings seriously. A child who feels afraid may try to avoid talking about it. If you avoid talking, their imagination will continue unchecked. By your words and actions you can provide reassurance. When talking with your child, be sure to present a realistic picture that is both honest and manageable.

Feelings of fear are healthy and natural for adults and children. But as an adult, you need to keep control of the situation. When you're sure that danger has passed, concentrate on your child's emotional needs by asking the child what's uppermost in his or her mind. Having children participate in the family's recovery activities will help them feel that their life will return to "normal." Your response during this time may have a lasting impact.

Be aware that after a disaster, children are most afraid that:

- The event will happen again.
- Someone will be injured or killed.
- They will be separated from the family.
- They will be left alone.