



Helping Your Child After a Natural Disaster

Children look to their parents for support. You are very important to your child. After a disaster, you can help your child feel safe and secure.

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Parents
Helping
Children



Help your child feel safe

Stay close to your child. This helps them feel safe. Hug them, hold them, and keep them close to you. Tell them that you will take care of them. Reassure them by saying, “I am here for you.” Sing favorite songs. Tell favorite stories. Play favorite games. Eat familiar foods

As much as possible, stick to daily routines

Children do best with familiar routines. Keep your family’s bedtime routine, such as a bedtime story, a family prayer, and quiet time together. Keep familiar people around your family and support each other. As much as possible, help your child understand what is happening, and what will happen next. If school is open, help your child go back to school. School fills children’s time with familiar activities and gets things back to normal.

Be a good listener and answer your child’s questions

Your child may ask hard questions about death or why disasters happen. As best you can, answer with easy-to-understand facts. It is OK if you do not know all the answers.

Understand your child’s behavior

After a disaster, your child’s behavior may change. Some children may suck their thumb, complain of stomach aches, and be irritable. They may be afraid of the dark and afraid to be alone. They may have nightmares and trouble sleeping. They may cry, express anger, argue, or fight with others. They may cling to you. This is normal. Be patient. Let your children know you are there for them.

Your child needs to know that you have hope for a better tomorrow.



Help your child understand emotions

Help your child understand emotions. Your child may be afraid, worried, sad, scared, or angry. They may feel out of control. Help your child name their feelings and let them know these feelings are normal. After a disaster many people have these feelings. Help your child use words to express feelings in ways that do not hurt themselves or others. Encourage physical activities to help your child let off strong feelings. However, each child is different. Some want to run and play and others want to stay close to their parents.

Help your child express their thoughts and feelings

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Help your child tell their story

As things return to normal, encourage your child to talk about the disaster. This helps them make sense of what happened. One way to talk about the disaster is to help your child tell, write, or draw a story about it—what happened before, during, and after the disaster. Include their feelings about what happened. Keep adding to the story as your family and community recover. Include hope for a better tomorrow.

Be positive and hopeful with your child

Talk about your beliefs, and hold on to hope. Your child needs to know that you have hope for a better tomorrow. Do not spend too much time talking about the disaster and watching TV news. Too much of this adds to your child's worries.

Connect with community support

As a parent, you may feel tired and need personal support. Join with community activities and gatherings, attend church ceremonies, participate in rituals, encourage activities with friends, and reach out to extended family. Seek support if you have questions or need help with your child. You are not alone. As adults, we all need to support each other. Help your child feel safe.

