

Helping Children Cope with Disaster

Disasters may strike quickly and without warning. These events can be frightening for adults, but they are traumatic for children if they do not 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 will need to cope with 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. Ultimately, you should decide what is best for your children, but please consider using these suggestions as guidelines:

Children's Response to Disaster's:

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 will 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 is afraid. Your words and actions can provide reassurance. Your response during this time may have a lasting impact.

After a disaster, children may:

- Return to bedwetting.
- Have difficulty sleeping.
- Not want to be separated from their caregivers.
- Show signs of sadness or anger.
- Have trouble concentrating at school.
- Fear that the disaster will happen again.



What you can do to help:

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. As an adult, you need to keep control of the situation. When you are sure that danger has passed, concentrate on your child's emotional needs by asking the child what is on his or her mind. Listen to what a child is saying. If a child has difficulty expressing his or her thoughts and feelings, then encourage them to draw a picture or tell a story of what happened. If a child expresses a need for more information regarding the disaster, provide them factual information. Having children participate in the family's recovery activities will help them feel that their life will return to "normal." Involve your children by giving them specific tasks. Re-establish daily routines. If a child continues to be very upset by what happened, it may be appropriate to talk with your primary care provider or mental health professional.

Dare to Prepare!

For more Information, please call Office of Emergency Management at 951.413.3800