

Tips to Help Children Cope With Disasters

Disasters are frightening events. Normal routines of school, play, and home are disrupted, Things become confusing and children may become frightened. Children look to their parents for help and reassurance during and after a traumatic event. Below are some common reactions, and some things you can do to minimize the psychological impact of a disaster on children.



Understanding Children's Fears

Feelings of fear during disasters are healthy and normal for both children and adults. You, as an adult, need to be aware of these fears, recognize your child's reactions to them, and take steps to address and alleviate these fears. Remember, a child who is afraid, is really **afraid**. Children's greatest fears after a disaster are:

- That the child will be left alone.
- That the child will be separated from the family.
- That someone will be injured or killed.
- That the event will happen again.

What to Watch Out For

Below are some indicators that your children are having trouble coping with the disaster. Be sure to seek professional help if these symptoms are present.

Changes in appetite

Bowel or bladder problems

Sleep disorders or nightmares

Nausea

Headaches

Vague complaints of aches and pains

Skin disorders or rashes

Persistent itching & scratching

Unusual fear of darkness, monsters, weather, or separation.

Nervousness or irritability

Aggressive behavior

Excessive crying or whimpering

Inability to concentrate

Exaggeration or distortion of the experience

Repetitive talking about the experience

Fear of going to school

Antisocial behavior (lying, stealing)

Things to Do Before the Disaster

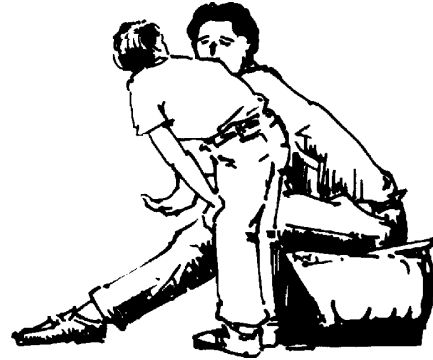
There are several things you can do to help prepare for children's reactions to disasters. Included in the list are:

- **Have Children Participate in the Disaster Plan:** Have your children actively participate in developing your family's disaster plan. This will help prepare them for the disaster, and let them know that they are an important part of the family.
- **Conduct Regular Disaster Drills:** Conduct regular disaster, and fire safety drills. Teach your children what smoke detectors or other alarms sound like. Practice "Drop, Cover, & Hold" and "Stop, Drop, & Roll" drills. Make sure they know where you meeting places are.
- **Teach Your Children How to Get Help:** Teach your children how to use 9-1-1 to summon help. Have them memorize important names, addresses, and telephone numbers.
- **Talk to Your Children:** Talk with your children honestly about what to expect from you after a disaster. Let them know that while it may take some time to reunite the family, (several days to a week) you will come and get them.
- **Coordinate With Your Child's School:** Find out what the school policies regarding emergencies are at your child's school, and what they will do with children after a disaster.
- **Get Your Child a "Disaster Buddy":** Purchase a small stuffed animal or doll that the child can talk to and take care of after the disaster. Include the child's "disaster buddy" along with other games and toys in your disaster kit.



Things to Do After the Disaster

- **Reunite the Family:** As quickly as possible, reunite the family at your predesignated meeting places.
- **Reassure Your Children:** Verbally reassure your children "We are all together" and "We will take care of you". You may have to repeat yourself many times. Be patient. Family hugs really help.
- **Listen to Your Children:** Listen to what your children tell you. Silent children should be encouraged to talk about their experiences.
- **Include Children in Recovery Activities:** Assign recovery chores to your children. This helps them feel that they are part of the recovery, and that everything will be all right.



Notes