

Caring for Children After a Disaster

“Children need to know that the adults who care for them will protect them and do everything they can to keep them safe and that they will take children’s worries seriously ... There is no magic formula or single right way to respond to a child in and after a crisis.”ⁱ

Avoid too much news media coverage.

Keep in mind, media images can be graphic. Children may have mixed reactions about the things they are seeing. Depending on their age, children may not have the understanding of time and space yet. As a result, they may assume that what they are seeing on the television is close to home. This may cause the fear that a disaster will hit in their neighborhood.ⁱⁱ

Maintain your daily routine.

Familiar routines and favorite rituals are very important in helping children feel safe. Keeping a regular schedule, especially when the world seems unpredictable, gives your child a sense of reassurance. Make sure children get appropriate sleep, exercise and nutrition.ⁱⁱⁱ Encourage activity and play since it’s a way for them to grieve and sort through fears and confusion.

Be available.

Listen and honestly answer questions at a level the children can understand. Don’t be afraid to admit that you can’t answer all their questions. Help them understand that there are no bad emotions and that a wide range of reactions is normal. Encourage children to express their feelings to adults (including teachers and parents) who can help them understand their sometimes strong and troubling emotions.^{iv}

Be flexible and patient.

Respect differences in children – both individual and age-based.^v Realize children’s behaviors are likely to change. For example, they may have difficulty sleeping, eat less or more than usual, and/or have emotional outbursts, become withdrawn or very clingy. Plan relaxed and pleasant family or group time together.^{vi}

Take care of yourself.

Rest, exercise, and try to eat regular, balanced meals. Make time for the things you enjoy. Talk with a trusted friend or seek the help of a health professional if needed.

*Mental Health (Stress & Anxiety) Counseling is available by SAMHSA at
1-800-985-5990 or text ‘TalkWithUs’ to 66746*



For more information and citations
visit the Head Start website at
<http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/sandy>



The list was adapted from the following resources:

Greenman, Jim. *What Happened to MY World? Helping Children Cope with Natural Disaster and Catastrophe*. Watertown, MA: Bright Horizons. 2001.

Ianni, Victoria. Parent and Guardians – Are You Aware Articles: *Talking with Your Child About Natural Disasters*. Washington, DC: Child Care Aware. 2011. <http://childcareaware.org/parents-and-guardians/newsletters/are-you-aware/talking-with-your-child-about-natural-disasters> (accessed November 7, 2012).

SAMSHA. Tips for Talking with Children after a Disaster: A Guide for Parents and Teachers. 2005. http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/health/Mental%20Health/Resources%20%26%20Support%20for%20Families/Parental%20Dpression/Tips_for_talking.pdf (accessed November 7, 2012).

ZERO TO THREE. *Little Listeners in an Uncertain World: Coping Strategies for You and Your Young Child after Traumatic Events*. Washington, DC. No date. <http://main.zerotothree.org/site/DocServer/handout.pdf/700245522?docID=2381&verID=1> (accessed November 7, 2012).

ⁱ Greenman, 2001, p. 33.

ⁱⁱ Ianni, Victoria (Child Care Aware), 2011.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ianni, Victoria (Child Care Aware), 2011.

^{iv} SAMSHA, 2005, p. 2.

^v Greenman, 2001, p. 33.

^{vi} Greenman, 2001, p. 33.



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