

AFTER A CRISIS: HOW YOUNG CHILDREN HEAL

Young children, toddlers, and preschoolers know when bad things happen, and they remember what they have been through. After a scary event, we often see changes in their behavior. They may cry more, become clingy and not want us to leave, have temper tantrums, hit others, have problems sleeping, become afraid of things that didn't bother them before, and lose skills they previously mastered. Changes like these are a sign that they need help. Here are some ways you can help them.

S SAFETY FIRST—YOUR YOUNG CHILD FEELS SAFE WHEN YOU

- ☐ Hold your child or let them stay close to you.
- ☐ Tell your child you will take care of them when things are scary or difficult. With children who are learning to talk, use simple words, like saying "Daddy's here."
- ☐ Keep them away from frightening TV images and scary conversations.
- ☐ Do familiar things, like singing a song you both like or telling a story.
- ☐ Let them know what will happen next (to the degree that you know).
- ☐ Have a predictable routine, at least for bedtime: a story, a prayer, cuddle time.
- ☐ Leave them with familiar people when you have to be away.
- ☐ Tell them where you are going and when you will come back.

A ALLOW EXPRESSION OF FEELINGS

- ☐ Young children often "behave badly" when they are worried or scared. Children can "act out" as a way of asking for help. Remember! Difficult feelings = Difficult behavior.
- ☐ Help your child name how they feel: "scared," "happy," "angry," "sad." Tell them it's OK to feel that way.
- ☐ Show your child the right way to behave, like saying "It's OK to be angry but it's not OK to hit me."
- ☐ Help your child express anger in ways that won't hurt, using words, play, or drawings.
- ☐ Talk about the things that are going well to help you and your child feel good.

F FOLLOW YOUR CHILD'S LEAD

- ☐ Different children need different things. Some children need to run around, others need to be held.
- ☐ Listen to your child and watch their behavior to figure out what they need.

E ENABLE YOUR CHILD TO TELL THE STORY OF WHAT HAPPENED DURING & AFTER

- ☐ Having a story helps your child make sense of what happened and cope better with it.
- ☐ Children use play to tell their story. For example, they may make popping sounds to show what they experienced. They may hide in the closet to show what it was like to shelter-in-place.
- ☐ Join your child in showing and telling not only what happened, step by step, but also how you both felt.
- ☐ As you tell the story, follow your child's lead. When the story is difficult, your young child may need breaks: running around, being held, playing something else. This is OK. They will come back to the story when they are ready.
- ☐ It can be hard to watch your children's play or listen to their stories of what happened. Get support if it is too hard for you to listen without becoming upset.

T TIES—RECONNECT WITH SUPPORTIVE PEOPLE, COMMUNITY, CULTURE & RITUALS

- ☐ Simple things like a familiar bedtime story, a song, a prayer, or family traditions remind you and your child of your way of life and offer hope.
- ☐ If you belong to a group, like a church, try to find ways of reconnecting with them.
- ☐ You can help your child best when you take care of yourself. Get support from others when you need it.

Y YOUR CHILD NEEDS YOU

- ☐ Reassure your child that you will be together.
- ☐ It is common for children to be clingy and worried about being away from you.
- ☐ Just being with your child, even when you can't fix things, helps your child.
- ☐ If you need to leave your child, let them know for how long and when you are coming back. If possible, leave something that belongs to you, or a picture that your child can have.

Age-Related Reactions to a Traumatic Event



A fundamental goal of parenting is to help children grow and thrive to the best of their potential. Parents anticipate protecting their children from danger whenever possible, but sometimes serious danger threatens, whether it is manmade, such as a school shooting or domestic violence, or natural, such as a flood or earthquake. And when a danger is life-threatening or poses a threat of serious injury, it becomes a potentially traumatic event for children.

By understanding how children experience traumatic events and how these children express their lingering distress over the experience, parents, physicians, communities, and schools can respond to their children and help them through this challenging time. The goal is to restore balance to these children's lives and the lives of their families.

HOW CHILDREN MAY REACT

How children experience traumatic events and how they express their lingering distress depends, in large part, on the children's age and level of development.

Preschool and young school-age children exposed to a traumatic event may experience a feeling of helplessness, uncertainty about whether there is continued danger, a general fear that extends beyond the traumatic event and into other aspects of their lives, and difficulty describing in words what is bothering them or what they are experiencing emotionally.

This feeling of helplessness and anxiety is often expressed as a loss of previously acquired developmental skills. Children who experience traumatic events might not be able to fall asleep on their own or might not be able to separate from parents at school. Children who might have ventured out to play in the yard prior to a traumatic event now might not be willing to play in the absence of a family member. Often, children lose some speech and toileting skills, or their sleep is disturbed by nightmares, night terrors, or fear of going to sleep. In many cases, children may engage in traumatic play—a repetitive and less imaginative form of play that may represent children's continued focus on the traumatic event or an attempt to change a negative outcome of a traumatic event.

For school-age children, a traumatic experience may elicit feelings of persistent concern over their own safety and the safety of others in their school or family. These children may be preoccupied with their own actions during the event. Often they experience guilt or shame over what they did or did not do during a traumatic event. School-age children might engage in constant retelling of the traumatic event, or they may describe being overwhelmed by their feelings of fear or sadness.

A traumatic experience may compromise the developmental tasks of school-age children as well. Children of this age may display sleep disturbances, which might include difficulty falling asleep, fear of sleeping alone, or frequent nightmares. Teachers often comment that these children are having greater difficulties concentrating and learning at school. Children of this age, following a traumatic event, may complain of headaches and stomach aches without obvious cause, and some children engage in unusually reckless or aggressive behavior.



Adolescents exposed to a traumatic event feel self-conscious about their emotional responses to the event. Feelings of fear, vulnerability, and concern over being labeled “abnormal” or different from their peers may cause adolescents to withdraw from family and friends. Adolescents often experience feelings of shame and guilt about the traumatic event and may express fantasies about revenge and retribution. A traumatic event for adolescents may foster a radical shift in the way these children think about the world. Some adolescents engage in self-destructive or accident-prone behaviors.

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HOW TO HELP

The involvement of family, physicians, school, and community is critical in supporting children through the emotional and physical challenges they face after exposure to a traumatic event.

For young children, parents can offer invaluable support, by providing comfort, rest, and an opportunity to play or draw. Parents can be available to provide reassurance that the traumatic event is over and that the children are safe. It is helpful for parents, family, and teachers to help children verbalize their feelings so that they don't feel alone with their emotions. Providing consistent caretaking by ensuring that children are picked up from school at the anticipated time and by informing children of parents' whereabouts can provide a sense of security for children who have recently experienced a traumatic event. Parents, family, caregivers, and teachers may need to tolerate regression in developmental tasks for a period of time following a traumatic event.

Older children will also need encouragement to express fears, sadness, and anger in the supportive environment of the family. These school-age children may need to be encouraged to discuss their worries with family members. It is important to acknowledge the normality of their feelings and to correct any distortions of the traumatic events that they express. Parents can be invaluable in supporting their children in reporting to teachers when their thoughts and feelings are getting in the way of their concentrating and learning.

For adolescents who have experienced a traumatic event, the family can encourage discussion of the event and feelings about it and expectations of what could have been done to prevent the event. Parents can discuss the expectable strain on relationships with family and peers, and offer support in these challenges. It may be important to help adolescents understand “acting out” behavior as an effort to voice anger about traumatic events. It may also be important to discuss thoughts of revenge following an act of violence, address realistic consequences of actions, and help formulate constructive alternatives that lessen the sense of helplessness the adolescents may be experiencing.

When children experience a traumatic event, the entire family is affected. Often, family members have different experiences around the event and different emotional responses to the traumatic event. Recognizing each others' experience of the event, and helping each other cope with possible feelings of fear, helplessness, anger, or even guilt in not being able to protect children from a traumatic experience, is an important component of a family's emotional recovery.

Helping School-Age Children with Traumatic Grief: Tips for Caregivers

After an important person dies, children grieve in different ways. When the death was sudden or frightening, some children develop traumatic grief responses, making it hard for them to cope with their grief. Below are ways to recognize and help your child with traumatic grief.

I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT:	YOU CAN HELP ME WHEN YOU:
1. My feelings about the death are confusing. Sometimes I feel okay, and other times I feel sad, scared, or just empty or numb. It's really hard to make the scary and sad feelings go away.	1. Talk about your feelings and encourage me to talk about mine as long as I feel comfortable.
2. Sometimes my upset feelings come out as bad behavior.	2. Help me do things to feel calm, get back to my routine, and have fun again. Are patient until I feel O.K.
3. I have trouble concentrating, paying attention, and sleeping sometimes, because what happened is on my mind.	3. Understand that thoughts about what happened get stuck in my mind. Help me relax at bedtime by reading stories or listening to music and reminding me that you keep me safe.
4. I might have physical reactions like stomach aches, headaches, feeling my heart pounding, and breathing too fast.	4. Help me do things that make me feel calm, take my mind off things, or slow down my breathing.
5. Sometimes I wonder if the death was my fault.	5. Reassure me that it was not my fault.
6. I sometimes think the same thing will happen to me or other people I love.	6. Remind me about the things we do to stay safe and take care of ourselves. Help me remember all the people who take care of me.
7. I keep thinking about what happened over and over in my head.	7. Listen to what is on my mind. Tell me honestly what happened, using words I can understand. Do not let me see it on TV or other media if the story is in the news.
8. Sometimes I don't like to think or talk about the person who died, because it's too hard. I may not tell you everything because I don't want to upset you.	8. Don't make me talk about what happened. Don't get mad if I don't want to talk it or about the person.
9. I don't like to go to some places or do some things that remind me of the person who died, or of how my life has changed since the person died, because I get upset.	9. Don't make me go places if it still makes me too upset or scared.
10. I have trouble remembering good things about the person because I remember other things that make me too mad, sad, or scared, and they get in the way.	10. Understand that I am still too scared and sad to think about the happy times right now. Help me to feel better.

If any of these problems get in the way of your child having fun, going to school, being with friends, or doing other activities, you can make an appointment with your child to see a mental health professional with expertise in treating traumatized children.



HELPING TEENS WITH TRAUMATIC GRIEF: TIPS FOR CAREGIVERS

Each teen grieves in unique ways. After a sudden or violent death some teens may develop traumatic grief responses and have difficulty coping. Here are ways to recognize and help your teen with traumatic grief. Being nonjudgmental, open to compromise, and considering your teen's point of view are important.

I want you to know that:	You can help me when you:
1. I may feel sad, scared, empty, or numb but be embarrassed to show my true feelings. Also know that, I may say too much on social media.	1. Say that it is painful when someone you care about dies. Talk to me about your own feelings and invite me to talk about mine, but know I might not be ready. Discuss the importance of thinking about what I'm sharing on social media.
2. I might have behavior problems that are new or worse than before (angry outbursts, irritability, rule breaking, revenge seeking). I may be doing serious, unsafe, or harmful behaviors (self-injury, risky sexual behavior, drug or alcohol use).	2. Have patience and try to remain calm while setting appropriate limits on behaviors. Encourage me to get back to routines and activities with friends. For serious, risky, or harmful behaviors, offer to get me outside help.
3. I have trouble concentrating and paying attention or may have a change in sleep patterns, such as staying up later or sleeping all day.	3. Realize that I may be having scary thoughts about what happened and not tell you. Talk with me about ways to cope, like getting back to enjoyable activities, or listening to calming music, or taking a technology break to help me to sleep better.
4. I may have physical reactions like jumpiness, stomach aches, headaches, a pounding heart, or body aches. These may be worse after being around people, places, sounds, situations or other things that remind him of the trauma or the person who died	4. Recognize that I may minimize physical reactions—or do the opposite—exaggerate a minor ailment or injury. Encourage me to use physical activities to release tension or to try relaxing things like deep breathing or gentle stretching.
5. I may think that life is meaningless, feel guilty for being okay, or withdraw from family and friends. I also may retreat to social media or gaming.	5. Discuss solutions for feeling sad and mention that, while social media can be helpful, it may be better seeing friends in person. Check with other adults I trust to discuss ways to support me. If I seem very sad or guilty, seek professional help.
6. Sometimes I wonder if something bad will happen to me or that other important people in my life. I may express this by appearing anxious, worried, seeming not to care about the future (not studying, skipping school), or doing risky things.	6. Help me develop a realistic picture of the dangers in life. Talk about ways for me to take control of my safety and future (e.g. driving carefully, eating well and exercising, asking others for help).
7. I may talk about feeling responsible for the death.	7. Give honest, accurate, and age-appropriate information. Teens get information from all kinds of media, so let me know you will always tell me the truth. If I feel responsible, reassure me to not worry; that I did the best I could at the time.



I want you to know that:	You can help me when you:
8. Sometimes I might not want to talk about the person who died. I may try to change or reject the topic (“leave me alone”), or shrug it off. I may hide my discomfort and act as if nothing bothers me or as if I’m is doing fine.	8. Realize that I may think that talking about the trauma or the person who died will upset you. Even if you feel rejected, do stay involved with me and know where I am and what I’m is doing. I need your presence more than ever.
9. I might refuse to go places or do things that remind me of the person who died, or avoid how my life has changed since the person died.	9. Understand that I may be overwhelmed by upsetting feelings, but want to look strong or act as if nothing is wrong. This may be a sign of traumatic grief, and a professional can help.
10. I may not want to talk about or remember good things about the person who died because it brings up reminders of the their death.	10. Understand that I may feel angry and helpless about what has happened to my family. Help me find words to express my feelings. Acknowledge that I have lots of reasons to be angry, and that words are better than behaviors that may make me feel bad.

If any of these problems get in the way of your teen’s functioning at school or home, or continue more than 1-2 months, get help from a mental health professional who has experience treating children and teens with trauma or traumatic grief.

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Helping Young Children with Traumatic Grief: Tips for Caregivers

Each child grieves in his or her unique way. After a death that occurs under traumatic circumstances, some young children develop traumatic grief responses, making it hard to cope with their loss. Here are ways to recognize and help young child with traumatic grief.

I WANT YOU TO KNOW THAT:	YOU CAN HELP ME WHEN YOU:
1. Even though I am a very young, I miss the person and get very sad.	1. Teach me to talk about my feelings with words. Tell me it is OK to be sad and that you get sad too. Be careful not to get too upset around me, because it might make me worry.
2. My feelings change a lot. Sometimes I am sad and other times I like to have fun.	2. Try to understand me and get it right and when you tell me you understand how I feel and that it is OK.
3. I do not understand that when someone dies they are gone and can never come back.	3. Remind me quietly that the person cannot come back—even if I ask over and over again. Don't say things to grownups that will scare me or confuse me because I do hear you, even if you don't think I do.
4. Sometimes I worry that I will die or that you will not come back if you leave. I might cry and cling to you at bedtime or going to school.	4. Tell me that you will keep us safe. Tell me when you leave that you will always come back and give me a picture of us or a note in my lunchbox to remind me that you will be back. Remind me that I can always feel better when I cuddle my blanket or teddy bear. Help me relax at bedtime by reading stories or listening to music.
5. My upset feelings might come out as physical reactions like tummy aches and headaches or as behavior problems like not listening or fighting. Sometimes I may act like a baby by sucking my thumb or wetting my bed or my clothes.	5. Help me do things to feel calmer, get back to my routines and activities, and have fun again.
6. Sometimes over and over I keep playing how the person died (like making my toy cars crash or having bad guys shooting) to try to understand it.	6. Help me understand the death with words I can understand. Tell me the truth simply without scary details. Do not let me see pictures of what happened if it is on the news.
7. I may not want to talk about the person who died because it's too hard or because I don't want to make you cry.	7. Don't get mad if I don't want to talk about the person who died yet.
8. I may not like to do things or go places that remind me of the person who died.	8. Tell me that you understand that it is too hard right now for me to do things or go places that remind me. Tell me that it won't always be this hard.
9. I may think the person who died did not come back because he is mad at me or that it was my fault. I might worry that if I do something wrong (like not follow the rules) someone else will die.	9. Reassure me that the death was not my fault, and I did not make it happen. Explain that the person who died loved me and would come back if she could, but when people die they cannot come back.
10. I may worry I can't remember things about the person who died and what we did together.	10. Keep pictures of the person who died around for me to see. Tell me stories about the person and make me a memory book so I can keep the person in my mind and my heart.

If you are worried about how your child is doing or if any of these problems get in the way of your child having fun, going to school, being with friends, or other functioning, go with your child to a mental health professional with expertise in treating traumatized children.

Parent Tips for Helping Adolescents after Disasters

Reactions	Responses	Examples of things to do and say
<u>Detachment, shame, and guilt</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a safe time to discuss with your teen the events and their feelings. Emphasize that these feelings are common, and correct excessive self-blame with realistic explanations of what actually could have been done. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Many teens—and adults—feel like you do, angry and blaming themselves that they could have done more. You’re not at fault. Remember even the firefighters said there was nothing more we could have done.”
<u>Self-consciousness:</u> About their fears, sense of vulnerability, fear of being labeled abnormal.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help teens understand that these feelings are common. Encourage relationships with family and peers for needed support during the recovery period. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “I was feeling the same thing. Scared and helpless. Most people feel like this when a disaster happens, even if they look calm on the outside.” “My cell phone is working again, why don’t you see if you can get a hold of Pete to see how he’s doing.” “And thanks for playing the game with your little sister. She’s much better now.”
<u>Acting out behavior:</u> Using alcohol or drugs, sexually acting out, accident-prone behavior.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help teens understand that acting out behavior is a dangerous way to express strong feelings (like anger) over what happened. Limit access to alcohol and drugs. Talk about the danger of high-risk sexual activity. On a time-limited basis, keep a closer watch on where they are going and what they are planning to do. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Many teens—and some adults—feel out of control and angry after a disaster like this. They think drinking or taking drugs will help somehow. It’s very normal to feel that way—but it’s not a good idea to act on it.” “It’s important during these times that I know where you are and how to contact you.” Assure them that this extra checking-in is temporary, just until things have stabilized.
<u>Fears of recurrence and reactions to reminders</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help to identify different reminders (people, places, sounds, smells, feelings, time of day) and to clarify the difference between the event and the reminders that occur after it. Explain to teens that media coverage of the disaster can trigger fears of it happening again. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “When you’re reminded, you might try saying to yourself, ‘I am upset now because I am being reminded, but it is different now because there is no hurricane and I am safe.’” Suggest, “Watching the news reports could make it worse, because they are playing the same images over and over. How about turning it off now?”

Parent Tips for Helping Adolescents after Disasters

Reactions	Responses	Examples of things to do and say
<u>Abrupt shifts in interpersonal relationships</u> : Teens may pull away from parents, family, and even from peers; they may respond strongly to parent's reactions in the crisis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain that the strain on relationships is expectable. Emphasize that everyone needs family and friends for support during the recovery period. Encourage tolerance for different family members' courses of recovery. Accept responsibility for your own feelings. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spend more time talking as a family about how everyone is doing. Say, "You know, the fact that we're crabby with each other is completely normal, given what we've been through. I think we're handling things amazingly. It's a good thing we have each other." You might say, "I appreciate your being calm when your brother was screaming last night. I know he woke you up, too." "I want to apologize for being irritable with you yesterday. I am going to work harder to stay calm myself."
<u>Radical changes in attitude</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explain that changes in people's attitudes after a disaster are common, but often return back over time. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "We are all under great stress. When people's lives are disrupted this way, we all feel more scared, angry—even full of revenge. It might not seem like it, but we all will feel better when we get back to a more structured routine."
<u>Premature entrance into adulthood</u> : (wanting to leave school, get married).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage postponing major life decisions. Find other ways to make the teens feel more in control. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "I know you're thinking about quitting school and getting a job to help out. But it's important not to make big decisions right now. A crisis time is not a great time to make major changes."
<u>Concern for other survivors and families</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage constructive activities on behalf of others, but do not let them burden themselves with undue responsibility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help teens to identify projects that are age-appropriate and meaningful (clearing rubble from school grounds, collecting money or supplies for those in need).

Parent Tips for Helping Infants and Toddlers after Disasters

If Your Child	Understand	Ways to Help
<p>... has problems sleeping, doesn't want to go to bed, won't sleep alone, wakes up at night screaming.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When children are scared, they want to be with people who help them feel safe, and they worry when you are not together. If you were separated during the disaster, going to bed alone may remind your child of that separation. Bedtime is a time for remembering because we are not busy doing other things. Children often dream about things they fear and can be scared of going to sleep. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you want, let your child sleep with you. Let him know this is just for now. Have a bedtime routine: a story, a prayer, cuddle time. Tell him the routine (every day), so he knows what to expect. Hold him and tell him that he is safe, that you are there and will not leave. Understand that he is not being difficult on purpose. This may take time, but when he feels safer, he will sleep better.
<p>... worries something bad will happen to you. (You may also have worries like this.)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It is natural to have fears like this after being in danger. These fears may be even stronger if your child was separated from loved ones during the disaster. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remind your child and yourself that right now you are safe. If you are not safe, talk about how you are working to keep her safe. Make a plan for who would care for your child if something did happen to you. This may help you worry less. Do positive activities together to help her think about other things.
<p>... cries or complains whenever you leave him, even when you go to the bathroom.</p> <p>... can't stand to be away from you.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Children who cannot yet speak or say how they feel may show their fear by clinging or crying. Goodbyes may remind your child of any separation you had related to the disaster. Children's bodies react to separations (stomach sinks, heart beats faster). Something inside says, "Oh no, I can't lose her." Your child is not trying to manipulate or control you. He is scared. He may also get scared when other people (not just you) leave. Goodbyes make him scared. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Try to stay with your child and avoid separations right now. For brief separations (store, bathroom), help your child by naming his feelings and linking them to what he has been through. Let him know you love him and that this goodbye is different, you'll be back soon. "You're so scared. You don't want me to go because last time I was gone you didn't know where I was. This is different, and I'll be right back." For longer separations, have him stay with familiar people, tell him where you are going and why, and when you will come back. Let him know you will think about him. Leave a photo or something of yours and call if you can. When you come back, tell him you missed him, thought about him, and did come back. You will need to say this over and over.
<p>... has problems eating, eats too much or refuses food.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stress affects your child in different ways, including her appetite. Eating healthfully is important, but focusing too much on eating can cause stress and tension in your relationship. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relax. Usually, as your child's level of stress goes down, her eating habits will return to normal. Don't force your child to eat. Eat together and make meal times fun and relaxing. Keep healthy snacks around. Young children often eat on the go. If you are worried, or if your child loses a significant amount of weight, consult a pediatrician.

Parent Tips for Helping Infants and Toddlers after Disasters

If Your Child	Understand	Ways to Help
<p>... is not able to do things he used to do (like use the potty).</p> <p>... does not talk like he used to.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Often when young children are stressed or scared, they temporarily lose abilities or skills they recently learned. This is the way young children tell us that they are not okay and need our help. Losing an ability after children have gained it (like starting to wet the bed again) can make them feel ashamed or embarrassed. Caregivers should be understanding and supportive. Your child is not doing this on purpose. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid criticism. It makes him worried that he'll never learn. Do not force your child. It creates a power struggle. Instead of focusing on the ability (like not using the potty), help your child feel understood, accepted, loved, and supported. As your child feels safer, he will recover the ability he lost.
... is reckless, does dangerous things.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It may seem strange, but when children feel unsafe, they often behave in unsafe ways. It is one way of saying, "I need you. Show me I'm important by keeping me safe." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Keep her safe. Calmly go and get her and hold her if necessary. Let her know that what she is doing is unsafe, that she is important, and you wouldn't want anything to happen to her. Show her other more positive ways that she can have your attention.
... is scared by things that did not scare her before.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young children believe their parents are all-powerful and can protect them from anything. This belief helps them feel safe. Because of what happened, this belief has been damaged, and without it, the world is a scarier place. Many things may remind your child of the disaster (rain, aftershocks, ambulances, people yelling, a scared look on your face), and will scare her. It is not your fault—it was the disaster. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When your child is scared, talk to her about how you will keep her safe. If things remind your child of the disaster and cause her to worry that it is happening again, help her understand how what is happening now (like rain or aftershocks) is different from the disaster. If she talks about monsters, join her in chasing them out. "Go away, monster. Don't bother my baby. I'm going to tell the monster boo, and it will get scared and go away. Boo, boo." Your child is too young to understand and recognize how you did protect her, but remind yourself of the good things you did.
... seems "hyper," can't sit still, and doesn't pay attention to anything.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fear can create nervous energy that stays in our bodies. Adults sometimes pace when worried. Young children run, jump, and fidget. When our minds are stuck on bad things, it is hard to pay attention to other things. Some children are naturally active. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help your child to recognize his feelings (fear, worry) and reassure your child that he is safe. Help your child get rid of nervous energy (stretching, running, sports, breathing deep and slow). Sit with him and do an activity you both enjoy (throw a ball, read books, play, draw). Even if he doesn't stop running around, this helps him. If your child is naturally active, focus on the positive. Think of all the energy he has to get things done, and find activities that fit his needs.
<p>... plays in a violent way.</p> <p>... keeps talking about the disaster and the bad things he saw.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Young children often talk through play. Violent play can be their way of telling us how crazy things were or are, and how they feel inside. When your child talks about what happened, strong feelings may come up both for you and your child (fear, sadness, anger). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If you can tolerate it, listen to your child when he "talks." As your child plays, notice the feelings he has and help him by naming feelings and being there to support him (hold him, soothe him). If he gets overly upset, spaces out, or he plays out the same upsetting scene, help him calm down, help him feel safe, and consider getting professional help.

Parent Tips for Helping Infants and Toddlers after Disasters

If Your Child	Understand	Ways to Help
<p>. . is now very demanding and controlling.</p> <p>. . seems “stubborn” insisting that things be done her way.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Between the age of 18 months to 3 years, young children often seem “controlling.” It can be annoying, but it is a normal part of growing up and helps them learn that they are important and can make things happen. When children feel unsafe, they may become more controlling than usual. This is one way of dealing with fears. They are saying, “Things are so crazy I need control over something.” 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remember your child is not controlling or bad. This is normal, but may be worse right now because she feels unsafe. Let your child have control over small things. Give her choices over what she wears or eats, games you play, stories you read. If she has control over small things, it can make her feel better. Balance giving her choices and control with giving her structure and routines. She will feel unsafe if she “runs the show.” Cheer her on as she tries new things. She can also feel more in control when she can put her shoes on, put a puzzle together, pour juice.
<p>. . tantrums and is cranky.</p> <p>. . yells a lot – more than usual.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Even before the disaster, your child may have had tantrums. They are a normal part of being little. It’s frustrating when you can’t do things and when you don’t have the words to say what you want or need. Now, your child has a lot to be upset about (just like you) and may really need to cry and yell. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Let him know you understand how hard this is for him. “Thing are really bad right now. It’s been so scary. We don’t have your toys or TV, and you’re mad.” Tolerate tantrums more than you usually would, and respond with love rather than discipline. You might not normally do this, but things are not normal. If he cries or yells, stay with him and let him know you are there for him. Reasonable limits should be set if tantrums become frequent or are extreme.
<p>. . hits you.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For children, hitting is a way of expressing anger. When children can hit adults they feel unsafe. It’s scary to be able to hit someone who’s supposed to protect you. Hitting can also come from seeing other people hit each other. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each time your child hits, let her know that this is not okay. Hold her hands, so she can’t hit, have her sit down. Say something like, “It’s not okay to hit, it’s not safe. When you hit, you are going to need to sit down.” If she is old enough, give her the words to use or tell her what she needs to do. Tell her, “Use your words. Say, I want that toy.” Help her express anger in other ways (play, talk, draw). If you are having conflict with other adults, try to work it out in private, away from where your child can see or hear you. If needed, talk with a friend or professional about your feelings.
<p>. . says “Go away, I hate you!”</p> <p>. . says “This is all your fault.”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The real problem is the disaster and everything that followed, but your child is too little to fully understand that. When things go wrong, young children often get mad at their parents because they believe they should have stopped it from happening. You are not to blame, but now is not the time to defend yourself. Your child needs you. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Remember what your child has been through. He doesn’t mean everything he is saying; he’s angry and dealing with so many difficult feelings. Support your child’s feeling of anger, but gently redirect the anger towards the disaster. “You are really mad. Lots of bad things have happened. I’m mad too. I really wish it didn’t happen, but even mommies can’t make hurricanes not happen. It’s so hard for both of us.”

Parent Tips for Helping Infants and Toddlers after Disasters

If Your Child	Understand	Ways to Help
<p>... doesn't want to play or do anything.</p> <p>... seems to not really have any feelings (happy or sad).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your child needs you. So much has happened and he may be feeling sad and overwhelmed. When children are stressed, some yell and others shut down. Both need their loved ones. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sit by your child and keep him close. Let him know you care. If you can, give words to his feelings. Let him know it's okay to feel sad, mad, or worried. "It seems like you don't want to do anything. I wonder if you are sad. It's okay to be sad. I will stay with you." Try to do things with your child, anything he might like (read a book, sing, play together).
... cries a lot.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Your family may have experienced difficult changes because of the disaster, and it is natural that your child is sad. When you let your child feel sad and provide her with comfort, you help your child even if she remains sad. If you have strong feelings of sadness, it may be good for you to get support. Your child's well-being is connected to your well-being. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow your child to express feelings of sadness. Help your child name her feelings and understand why she may feel that way. "I think you're sad. A lot of hard things have happened" Support your child by sitting with her and giving her extra attention. Spend special time together. Help your child feel hopeful about the future. Together think and talk about how your lives will continue and the good things you will do, like go for a walk, go to the park or zoo, play with friends. Take care of yourself.
... misses people you are no longer able to see after the disaster.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Even though young children do not always express how they feel, be aware that it is difficult for them when they lose contact with important people. If someone close to your child died, your child may show stronger reactions to the disaster. Young children do not understand death, and may think that the person can come back. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For those that have moved away, help your child stay in touch in some way (for example, sending pictures or cards, calling). Help your child talk about these important people. Even when we are apart from people, we can still have positive feelings about them by remembering and talking about them. Acknowledge how hard it is to not be able to see people we care for. It is sad. Where someone has died, answer your child's questions simply and honestly. When strong reactions last longer than two weeks, seek help from a professional.
... misses things you have lost because of the disaster.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When a disaster brings so much loss to a family and community, it is easy to lose sight of how much the loss of a toy or other important item (blanket) can mean to a child. Grieving for a toy is also your child's way of grieving for all you had before the disaster. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allow your child to express feelings of sadness. It is sad that your child lost her toy or blanket. If possible, try to find something that would replace the toy or blanket that would be acceptable and satisfying to your child. Distract your child with other activities.

Parent Tips for Helping School-Age Children after Disasters

Reactions	Responses	Examples of things to do and say
<u>Confusion about what happened</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give clear explanations of what happened whenever your child asks. Avoid details that would scare your child. Correct any misinformation that your child has about whether there is a present danger. Remind children that there are people working to keep families safe and that your family can get more help if needed. Let your children know what they can expect to happen next. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “I know other kids said that more tornadoes are coming, but we are now in a safe place.” Continue to answer questions your children have (without getting irritable) and to reassure them the family is safe. Tell them what’s happening, especially about issues regarding school and where they will be living.
<u>Feelings of being responsible:</u> School-age children may have concerns that they were somehow at fault, or should have been able to change what happened. They may hesitate to voice their concerns in front of others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide opportunities for children to voice their concerns to you. Offer reassurance and tell them why it was not their fault. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Take your child aside. Explain that, “After a disaster like this, lots of kids—and parents too—keep thinking, ‘What could I have done differently?’ or ‘I should have been able to do something.’ That doesn’t mean they were at fault.” “Remember? The firefighter said no one could save Pepper and it wasn’t your fault.”
<u>Fears of recurrence of the event and reactions to reminders</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help identify different reminders (people, places, sounds, smells, feelings, time of day) and clarify the difference between the event and the reminders that occur after it. Reassure them, as often as they need, that they are safe. Protect children from seeing media coverage of the event, as it can trigger fears of the disaster happening again. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> When they recognize that they are being reminded, say, “Try to think to yourself, I am upset because I am being reminded of the hurricane because it is raining, but now there is no hurricane and I am safe.” “I think we need to take a break from the TV right now.” Try to sit with your child while watching TV. Ask your child to describe what they saw on the news. Clarify any misunderstandings.
<u>Retelling the event or playing out the event over and over</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Permit the child to talk and act out these reactions. Let him know that this is normal. Encourage positive problem-solving in play or drawing. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> “You’re drawing a lot of pictures of what happened. Did you know that many children do that?” “It might help to draw about how you would like your school to be rebuilt to make it safer.”

Parent Tips for Helping School-Age Children after Disasters

Reactions	Responses	Examples of things to do and say
<u>Fear of being overwhelmed by their feelings</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide a safe place for her to express her fears, anger, sadness, etc. Allow children to cry or be sad; don't expect them to be brave or tough. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "When scary things happen, people have strong feelings, like being mad at everyone or being very sad. Would you like to sit here with a blanket until you're feeling better?"
<u>Sleep problems:</u> Bad dreams, fear of sleeping alone, demanding to sleep with parents.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Let your child tell you about the bad dream. Explain that bad dreams are normal and they will go away. Do not ask the child to go into too many details of the bad dream. Temporary sleeping arrangements are okay; make a plan with your child to return to normal sleeping habits. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "That was a scary dream. Let's think about some good things you can dream about and I'll rub your back until you fall asleep." "You can stay in our bedroom for the next couple of nights. After that we will spend more time with you in your bed before you go to sleep. If you get scared again, we can talk about it."
<u>Concerns</u> about the safety of themselves and others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help them to share their worries and give them realistic information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create a "worry box" where children can write out their worries and place them in the box. Set a time to look these over, problem-solve, and come up with answers to the worries.
<u>Altered behavior:</u> Unusually aggressive or restless behavior.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage the child to engage in recreational activities and exercise as an outlet for feelings and frustration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "I know you didn't mean to slam that door. It must be hard to feel so angry." "How about if we take a walk? Sometimes getting our bodies moving helps with strong feelings."
<u>Somatic complaints:</u> Headaches, stomachaches, muscle aches for which there seem to be no reason.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find out if there is a medical reason. If not, provide comfort and assurance that this is normal. Be matter-of-fact with your child; giving these complaints too much attention may increase them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Make sure the child gets enough sleep, eats well, drinks plenty of water, and gets enough exercise. "How about sitting over there? When you feel better, let me know and we can play cards."
<u>Closely watching a parent's responses and recovery:</u> Not wanting to disturb a parent with their own worries.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give children opportunities to talk about their feelings, as well as your own. Remain as calm as you can, so as not to increase your child's worries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Yes, my ankle is broken, but it feels better since the paramedics wrapped it. I bet it was scary seeing me hurt, wasn't it?"
<u>Concern</u> for other survivors and families.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage constructive activities on behalf of others, but do not burden them with undue responsibility. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Help children identify projects that are age-appropriate and meaningful (clearing rubble from school grounds, collecting money or supplies for those in need).