



Disaster

readiness · response · recovery

Helping Your Child Through the Crisis

A disaster can make a child afraid, more afraid than you. A child can mix up real fear and make-believe fear. This is okay. You can help.

- Don't leave your child alone in a new place.
- Stay together to show you won't go away.
- Tell the child about the disaster.
- Tell the child you were afraid.

Talk with your child.

- Help your child talk.
- Listen to the child.
- Say it's okay to be afraid.
- Hold and hug the child.
- Explain. Talk. Listen. Over and over.

Keep working to make things better.

- As long as it can be done safely, let him or her help clean up.
- Don't stop doing things.
- Put order in your day as best you can.
- Tell the child about your plans each day.
- Stay close together.



Bedtime may be bad.

- Your child may not want to sleep away from you.
- Your child may be afraid of the dark.
- Your child may have bad dreams or begin to wet the bed again.

You can help.

- Explain why it gets dark.
- Talk about dreams.
- Praise the child for good things.
- Don't yell.
- Don't spank.

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- Agree on a time for your child to go to bed.
- Leave the door open a little. Leave the light on.
- Read to your child.
- Tell a story about something good that happened that day.

If you stay worried about the child, seek help. Schools can help you find professional help. Remember, this is a hard time for you, too.

Childcare During and After a Disaster

Immediately after a disaster and during the recovery period, you may worry about your child care. Where will your children be safe? Who can watch them while you are busy dealing with agencies,

cleaning, and repairs? If you do not already have regular childcare arrangements, check with churches, clergy, church members, childcare facilities, relatives, sitters, or neighbors. After-school or summer school activities would give the child a meaningful place to be and would free you to deal with the crisis. Library programs, foster grandparent agencies, 4-H clubs, and church youth groups are other alternatives. There may be money available to help you pay for the care.

General Guidelines

- Spend more time with your child. Use part of that time to talk.
- Your child will be comforted by familiar surroundings.

Get copies of photos from family and friends and allow your child to replace lost stuffed animals.

- Expect to have greater difficulty at times of separation (leaving for school, bedtime) and provide extra reassurance. Let your child know where you are. Day-time phone calls can help reassure your child.
- Monitor your child's viewing of the disaster on television and other media. Repeated viewing of disaster scenes can be traumatic. If possible, watch with your child and discuss the programs you see.
- Allow your child to discuss the disaster, but do not force it. When discussing it, emphasize that he or she is now safe.

Adapted by Dr. Karen DeBord, Extension Child Development Specialist, Family and Consumer Sciences, North Carolina Cooperative Extension Service for *Stress and Coping with Disaster* by Karen DeBord, Marty Baker, Ami O'Neill, University of Missouri.