



Helping Children after a Disaster

- **Be honest with your children.** If there is a real risk, tell them. If the risk is small, say, “We are doing our best to keep us safe.” Remember that young children are concerned mainly about their immediate family’s safety.
- **Answer questions in language appropriate to your child’s age and understanding.** First ask about what is concerning them and what they already know. Give short answers to preschoolers and longer answers to elementary-aged children. Remember that young children will ask the same questions many times, seeking reassurance. Be patient and answer the questions the same way each time they ask. Have more extensive conversations with middle and high school students. Even if children do not ask questions, they may be worried. Ask open-ended questions to encourage communication. Offer opportunities for children to safely express their feelings through drawing, writing or puppetry.
- **Be sympathetic to children’s sense of loss over pets and toys and accept their expressions of fear as a rational reaction to something out of their control.** Letting children help others in age-appropriate ways can boost their sense of compassion and control.
- **Limit media.** Protect children from news reports about the hurricane and its aftermath whenever possible. When young children see repeated films of the same event, they think it is happening over and over again.
- **Consistent routine is important.** This gives the child reassurance of their own value and that the adult world is trying to help them feel safe. Continue to talk with your children, sing to them, read their favorite books, play board games, etc. when circumstances allow. Even if you are staying in a shelter, try to maintain some familiar routines and expectations for your family.
- **Try to remain calm and monitor adult conversations near the children:** If you become overwhelmed, find others to whom you can safely express anxiety while trying to maintain a positive tone around the children. A natural disaster can have an even greater effect on families who are already at risk. Since children can be affected, it is even more important to seek help for other family problems during times of crisis.

For answers to parenting questions, how to talk to your child, or how to locate child care in your area, contact Collaborative for Children.

www.collabforchildren.org

713.600.1234

www.earlyconnect.org



Resources with Help for Parents

Early Connections, a project of **Collaborative for Children**, www.collabforchildren.org, educates and informs parents, caregivers and the general public of the importance of experiences in the early years to a child's future growth and development. For information call **713-464-0800** or **1-877-511-KIDS (5437)** or visit the website, www.earlyconnect.org.

National Association for the Education of Young Children
<http://www.naeyc.org/families/disaster.asp>

National Association of School Psychologists
http://www.nasponline.org/NEAT/naturaldisaster_ho.html

Parenthood.com
http://parenthood.com/articles.html?article_id=8142

The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry (AACAP) offers Gulf Coast Families and Clinicians disaster resources. Some useful guides in starting a dialogue with children and adolescents include:

Facts for Families

English

- [Helping Children After a Disaster](#)
- [Posttraumatic Stress Disorder](#)
- [Children and Grief](#)
- [When to Seek Help for your Child](#)
- [Where to Seek Help for your Child](#)

Spanish

- [Ayudando a Los Niños Despues de una Catastrofe](#)
- [Trastorno de Tension Postraumatica](#)
- [Los Niños y la Pena Por la Muerte de un Ser Querido](#)
- [Estar Preparado "Sepa Cuándo Debe de Buscar Ayuda para Hijo/Hija"](#)
- [Estar Preparado "Sepa Dónde Conseguir Ayuda para su Niño"](#)

National Child Traumatic Stress Network
http://nctsn.org/nctsn/nav.do?pid=ctr_terr_hurr_desc

Sesame Street Parents
<http://www.sesameworkshop.org/hurricane-katrina/>

Family Information Services
<http://www.familyinfoserv.com/crisis.html>