All children are different. Some children might have symptoms of stress right after a disaster or emergency, while some may take weeks to have symptoms. Some children don’t have any symptoms at all. With care, attention, and understanding from parents and caregivers, symptoms of stress often go away on their own. If these symptoms don’t go away, your child might need to see a healthcare provider. If you are not sure how to support your child or teen, get support from a trusted friend or mental health professional.

The Media

Although you need to stay informed, seeing or hearing information about a disaster or emergency over and over can cause more stress. A child or teen might have an emotional or behavioural reaction because they don’t fully understand the event. A child or teen’s level of understanding and ways of coping will be different at different ages.

- Limit exposure to distressing images, TV, or radio reports.
- Watch or listen to reports on disasters or emergencies with your child or teen. Afterwards, talk about what was seen and heard. Your child needs your guidance and reassurance.

For more information on how to help your child learn to cope, visit:

www.aacap.org
(click on the tab called “families & youth” then go to “facts for families”)

www.nctsn.org
(enter the keywords “resources for parents and caregivers” in the search box)
Children and teens react to trauma and loss differently than adults do. Not all children or teens react the same way. It’s important to know what to expect. Show care and understanding to help your child or teen recover.

**Common Reactions to Stress**

**Children under 5 years old, may:**
- go back to doing things like he or she did when younger
- be afraid of strangers, animals, or monsters
- have changes in sleep patterns (e.g., sleep more or sleep less)
- have trouble falling asleep on their own
- start having nightmares
- cry more than normal
- change eating habits
- complain about aches or pains
- get confused easily
- want to always be with (cling to) adult caregivers
- have trouble talking (e.g., stuttering)

**Children 6 to 12 years old, may:**
- return to behaviours he or she did when younger
- have trouble falling asleep, staying asleep, or be scared to sleep alone
- have trouble concentrating (e.g., at school)
- complain of a headache or stomach ache without an obvious cause
- be more aggressive or withdrawn
- ask about spiritual beliefs
- have trouble with any medical problems (e.g., diabetes)

**Teens 13 to 18 years old may:**
- have trouble sleeping (e.g., too much or too little)
- complain of aches and pains, headaches, or stomach or bowel problems
- get sad or depressed
- be withdrawn or quiet
- act out or have aggressive behaviour
- have trouble with school or not want to go to school
- ask about spiritual beliefs
- feel guilty about surviving (if people have been hurt or have died)
- have trouble with any medical problems (e.g., diabetes)