



Experiencing disasters or emergencies can make children and teens feel uncertain and anxious. As a parent or caregiver, you can't control a stressful situation but you can control how you **REACT** to it.

Respond. How you respond to a stressful event can affect how your child reacts. Reacting in calm and productive ways will model good coping skills (e.g., talking about things calmly, taking care of yourself, problem-solving). It will help your child feel calmer and cope better.

Eat at regular times and drink water throughout the day to give your body the energy and nutrients it needs to cope in stressful situations. Take time to eat meals with your children, friends, and family. Sharing a meal can increase your sense of belonging and connection with others.

Activity. Physical activity like going for a walk outside, dancing, or skipping is a good way to connect with your child and can help reduce their anxiety and stress.

Connecting with other caregivers, families, and peers in the community can help you and your child to respond and cope better with a disaster. Find ways to help others when you can and accept help from others when you need it.

Talk. Let your child know it's okay to talk about what is going on. When they ask questions, listen without interrupting and answer honestly at a level they can understand (e.g., "There's a fire near our town. People are working hard to put it out. We're safe and far away from it."). If you don't know an answer to their question, it's okay to say that.

Stress and Disasters

Children react to disasters and emergencies differently than adults do. Any change in a child's environment or routine can make them feel insecure, scared, or confused. It's common for children and teens to experience stress during and after a disaster.

Common stress reactions for children under 5 years may include:

- crying more than usual
- changes in eating habits
- complaining about aches or pains
- being confused easily
- wanting to be held more
- fear of being alone
- trouble talking (e.g., stuttering)

Common stress reactions for children 6 to 11 years may include:

- doing things they did when younger (e.g., thumb sucking)
- changes in sleep patterns (e.g., trouble falling or staying asleep, scared to sleep alone)
- trouble concentrating
- complaining of a headache or stomach ache
- whiny, acting out, or aggressive behaviour
- asking about spiritual beliefs

Common stress reactions for children 12 years and older may include:

- changes in sleep patterns (e.g., too much or too little)
- complaining of aches and pains, headaches, or stomach problems
- becoming withdrawn or quiet
- acting out or aggressive behaviour
- questioning their spiritual beliefs
- feeling guilty about surviving (if people have been hurt or have died)
- trouble with existing medical problems



Tips to Help Your Child or Teen Cope

- Let them know that all emotions are okay. Help them name their feelings and understand how emotions make their body feel.
- Encourage them to share their feelings and concerns. Listen and validate what they're saying (e.g., "You're feeling sad that you lost your stuffy. That doesn't feel good.").
- Offer extra comfort and reassurance when they need it (e.g., stay with them, give hugs, let them know they're safe and that their safety is your main concern).
- Help them see the positive things that are happening (e.g., people are kind and are helping each other).
- Do things to stay busy (e.g., play games, colour, do puzzles, go for a walk).
- For younger children, it's important to have time to play and connect with other kids.
- Older children and teens might want to do things to help during a disaster. This will help them feel in control and provide them with a sense of purpose.
- Encourage teens to connect with their friends or other kids their age.
- Allow for quiet time. If your child is feeling overwhelmed, try to find a quiet spot where you can comfort them.
- Try to limit exposure to TV, radio, and social media. Hearing or seeing too much information about the disaster can be frightening, confusing, and overwhelming. If you do watch or listen to reports about the disaster with your child, talk about what they saw and heard and answer any questions they may have.



Important Numbers Available 24/7

Health Link
811

Addiction Helpline
1-866-332-2322

Mental Health Helpline
1-877-303-2642

Kids Help Phone
1-800-668-6868
www.KidsHelpPhone.ca

To order this resource, go to:
<https://dol.dataacm.com/>
Login ID: mentalhealthresources
Password: mh2016