



Children and teens don't react the same way as adults after a disaster or emergency.

During a disaster or emergency, a child's environment and routine may change. Your child may feel and act differently because he or she might not understand what has happened. Changes in behaviour can be part of how a child copes.

To help your child stay calm, reassure your child that he or she is safe, that you will protect him or her from danger, and that you will help if your child is scared.

Teens may need more attention after a disaster. A teen needs to feel that his or her fears are appropriate and are the same fears that other people have.

If your child's response to a disaster or emergency is affecting his or her home and school life, you may need to ask for support from a trusted friend or family member or a mental health professional.



If you or someone you know needs support, call:
Health Link Alberta
Toll Free: 1-866-408-LINK (5465)
Calgary: 403-943-LINK
Edmonton: 780-408-LINK

For information on how to request additional copies of this resource email:
HPDIP.MH.EarlyID@albertahealthservices.ca
Alberta Health Services
Mental Health Screening & Early Identification
10101 Southport Road S.W.
Calgary, AB T2W 3N2

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Revised: 2013-02-19



Helping Children and Teens Recover from a Disaster or Emergency





Common Stress Reactions

Under 5 years old:

- more afraid to be left alone
- change in appetite
- whining or clinging
- needs more soothing or sucking
- startles easier
- new fears

6 to 12 years old:

- gets quieter and withdraws more
- goes back to behaviours he or she did when younger
- has problems concentrating or following instructions
- more acting out behaviours
- has problems at school
- fighting more with brothers and sisters
- repeats same scenes of stressful event when playing

Teens:

- trouble sleeping
- eats too much or not enough
- acts out or rebels more
- problems at school
- physical problems (e.g., headaches, aches and pains, bowel problems)
- gets depressed or loses interest in social activities
- gets quieter and withdraws
- higher or lower energy level
- gives in to group or peer pressure

How You Can Help

Like an adult, your child or teen can have a delayed reaction to what he or she has been through. Your child can lose trust and may be afraid that the event will happen again.

After a traumatic event, help your child or teen to cope by reducing tension, anxiety, and feelings of guilt. Give your child or teen some responsibilities (e.g., caring for pets, helping someone). A meaningful task gives your child something else to focus on. Encourage good nutrition and sleep habits. These actions can decrease worry and help him or her to recover.

Helping Your Younger Child

- Let your child talk about the event from his or her point of view. Let your child know you will listen to his or her concerns and questions.
- Explain that his or her feelings are normal. Help your child talk about and cope with his or her feelings. Let your child know it is okay to feel angry or sad.
- Limit your child's exposure to media and adult conversations about the event.
- Try to keep to your family's routines. Make time for family time and play time together.
- Give your child a chance to play with other children, be with other children their age, and be active.
- It is important to comfort and hold your child to help him or her feel safe and secure. Offer reassurance, especially at bedtime.

Helping Your Teen

- Get back to normal routines as much as possible.
- Encourage, but don't force your teen to talk about the event.
- Talk about the disaster and plan what to do in future disasters. Let your teen know it is okay to talk about feelings.
- Listen to your teen's feelings or concerns without judging.
- Lighten your expectations at school and at home.
- Give your teen extra attention.
- Encourage your teen to take part in community rehabilitation work (e.g., cleanup work, rebuilding activities) as much as he or she can.
- Encourage your teen to be involved in regular social activities or clubs.

