



## Helping Your Child or Teen Prepare Emotionally for Disasters or Emergencies



### Healthy Habits for Your Child

- Toddlers and preschool children need 12 to 14 hours of sleep per night.
- Children between 6 and 12 need 10 to 12 hours of sleep per night.
- Make sure your child has time to play and be physically active.
- Make sure your child eats a healthy, well-balanced diet according to Canada’s Food Guide. Limit high-sugar foods or drinks.

### Healthy Habits for Your Teen

- Teens (13 to 18) need 9 to 12 hours of sleep per night.
- Model and encourage your teen to be physically active
- Model and encourage your teen to have many positive relationships.
- Model and encourage your teen to eat a healthy, well-balanced diet according to Canada’s Food Guide. Limit caffeine and high-fat and high-sugar foods.

### For Children and Teens

- Limit repeated or constant exposure to distressing pictures, TV, or radio reports.
- If your child watches or listens to reports about disasters or traumatic events, watch with him or her. Afterwards, talk to your child about what he or she saw to help make sense of the events.
- Children need age- appropriate guidance, perspective, and reassurance during traumatic events.

**All children and teens respond differently to a disaster or traumatic event.**

**When you help your child or teen learn to cope with feelings like anger, fear, guilt, and feeling helpless, you help build and strengthen your family’s ability to cope if a traumatic event happens.**

### Websites

[www.aacap.org](http://www.aacap.org)  
*(click on the tab called “families & youth”, then go to “facts for families”)*

[www.nctsn.org](http://www.nctsn.org)  
*(enter the keywords “resources for parents and caregivers” in the search box)*

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](mailto: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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Every parent hopes that their child never has to go through a disaster or traumatic event. But, it is likely at some point your child will face some kind of emergency. Helping your child or teen develop healthy emotional coping skills ahead of time can help him or her better react and recover after going through a distressing event.

**A traumatic event is anything that makes a child or teen feel overwhelmed either physically or emotionally.**

A child or teen can feel insecure, scared, or confused after:

- being involved in a traumatic event
- hearing others talk about a traumatic event over and over again
- seeing a traumatic event on TV

It can be hard for a child to cope if he or she doesn't understand what has happened or why it is affecting his or her routine. The more scared or helpless a child feels, the more likely he or she is to feel troubled.

As a parent or caregiver, you can lower the impact of a traumatic event by giving your child support and guidance that is right for his or her age. Helping a child develop healthy and effective ways to cope with daily challenges will help a child control how he or she reacts if an emergency happens.

## Building Blocks for **COPING** Emotionally

### **C**ommunicate and Connect with Others

Help your child learn words to describe and talk about his or her feelings. Let him or her know that it's okay and healthy to share worries with a trusted adult. Model and encourage positive communication skills for your teen. This can help him or her build healthy supportive groups of friends and family to safely share feelings with.

### **O**ptimism and a Positive Attitude Help

Plan regular family meals and have each person share at least one positive thing that happened that day. Teach your child how to look for the positives in a situation, especially times when the only positive is a chance to learn from the experience. Let your child have successes (e.g., doing age-appropriate tasks around the house and give praise for his or her effort).

### **P**articipate in Family and Community Events to Build Support Networks

Get your child to help you make an emergency kit for your house. Let your child help make a family emergency plan. Find events that you can do or volunteer at as a family.

### **I**dentify Stress

Ask your child what makes him or her feel stressed. Teach your child to know what he or she can and can't change or control. Help your child learn skills to problem solve and set realistic goals. Create easy chances for your child to practice problem-solving and setting goals every day. Teach your child how to break down big problems into small, more manageable steps to help cope with stressful times. Remember, your child is watching how you cope and problem-solve, so practice what you teach.

### **N**urture and Support your Child or Teen's Healthy Emotional Development

Let your child express him or herself. Listen to your child's feelings without judging. Have age-appropriate talks with your child. Let your child know that you care and want to understand how he or she reacts to stress. It is very important during an emergency to:

- reassure your child that he or she is safe
- let your child know that you will protect him or her from danger
- continue to help your child when he or she is scared

### **G**o for Help

Talk to your child about who he or she should ask for help in times of stress. Teach your child how to:

- call for help
- memorize emergency phone numbers



*(Adapted from the former David Thompson Health Region's brochure called Preparing Emotionally for Disaster)*