

CHILDREN'S REACTIONS TO DISASTER¹

Children may display a variety of **emotional reactions after a disaster**. It is very normal to be frightened, insecure, or upset about what happened.

How a parent reacts will make a difference in the child's understanding and recovery after the disaster. Parents should keep children informed about what is happening and explain it in terms they can understand.

Consider talking with the child's physician or a mental health professional if their emotional reactions concern you.

The following list includes some of the **normal reactions** children may have to the disaster:

Crying/Depression	Inability to concentrate
Bedwetting	Temporary withdrawal from others
Thumb sucking	Not wanting to attend school
Nightmares	Headaches
Clinging/fear of being left alone	Changes in eating and sleeping habits
Regression to previous behaviors	Excessive fear of darkness
Fighting	Increase in physical complaints

These are a few things parents or caregivers **can do to help children recover** from the disaster:

- Hug your child often.
- Reassure your child frequently that you are safe and together.
- Talk with your child about his/her feelings about the disaster. Share your feelings too. Provide information the child can understand.
- Talk about what happened.
- Spend extra time with your child at bedtime.
- Allow children to grieve about their lost treasures: a toy, a blanket, or a lost home.
- Talk with your child about what you will do if another disaster strikes. Let your child help prepare and plan for future disasters.
- Try to spend extra time together to begin replacing fears with pleasant memories.

¹ Adapted from <http://www.mentalhealth.org/dtac/ChildrensReactions.asp> 2004