

How to Talk to Children about Disaster:

Note to Parents¹:

- Remember that you and your child are having normal or common reactions to a very abnormal situation.
- Make sure you take care of your own physical and psychological needs so that you can attend to your child's needs.

A common misconception is that children will be frightened if you talk to them about what is going on. Children are usually more frightened if you whisper about it and avoid talking to them.²

How to start talking³:

- Give your children direct, undivided attention and let them know you want to listen and help them.
- Let your children ask questions freely and give them simple concrete answers.

How to listen and show you understand:

- Listen carefully to what they say, don't jump to conclusions, and repeat back to them what you heard them say
- Accept a child's perceptions. Avoid simply telling them to stop feeling the way they are. Talk about what makes them feel the way they do and what you can do to help.

¹ Psychosocial Issues for Children and Families in Disasters: A Guide for the Primary Care Physician. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Washington D.C., 1995.

² *Talking about Disaster: Guide for Standard Messages*. National Disaster Education Coalition. July 2004.

³ Schlichtemeir-Nutzman, Sue. *Help in the Aftermath: Post-disaster Resources*. Nebraska Department of Public Institutions and Federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. 1995.