

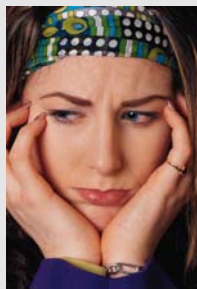
## CARE FOR KIDS

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### Creating A Healthy Mind For Optimal Learning Post-Katrina



# A Toolkit For Parents



# Caretakers and



# Teachers

CARE FOR KIDS: CREATING HEALTHY MINDS FOR OPTIMAL LEARNING

# A Toolkit for Parents, Caretakers and Teachers

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# Introduction

*Hurricane Katrina resulted in unprecedented damage to the Greater New Orleans Area completely destroying the educational and healthcare infrastructure. The impact on children and families has been serious.*

**H**urricane Katrina has left a negative imprint on the growth and development of the future of New Orleans. Not only has the healthcare and educational infrastructure been destroyed but the lives of families have been disrupted. As we approach the one year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, it is important to pay special attention to our children as rebuilding and recovery takes place. This toolkit is designed to assist parents, caretakers and teachers in helping kids during these most difficult times. The development of this toolkit has been supported by Dr. Vickie Mays, University of California, Los Angeles and the W. K. Kellogg Foundation.

## How to Utilize This Toolkit

This toolkit is merely a compilation of information from various sources that have done extensive research and work on the impact of disasters on children and what interventions are effective. It is meant to be easy to read in a short period of time and to serve as a reference. More in depth information can be found at the websites or original works cited. It is meant to be an orientation and a guide for parents, caretakers and teachers.

## You are not Alone

One of the first steps that parents caretakers and teachers must recognize in helping children is to take care of themselves and recognize that everyone in New Orleans has been impacted by Katrina to some degree. We must lift the stigma of talking to family members, friends, and clergy when we are feeling bad. There is nothing wrong with seeking help for depression, anxiety, sleep difficulties or bad memories. In fact, opening up to others is helpful. Encourage children to open up to you about their thoughts and feelings.

## Children, Families, and Communities are Resilient

Human beings in the face of negative situations are generally very adaptive. Even with an event as significant as Katrina, people can have positive outcomes. Take a minute and think about some of the positive things that have happened to you in the past year. Think about the positive steps you have taken since August 29<sup>th</sup>, 2005. Help the children in your life think of some of the positive things in their lives. Find a role model, someone who you think has overcome the odds, done well despite of all the terrible things that have happened to them. Talk to them; see how they stay positive despite all of the adversity that they face.

## How to Recognize When a Child Needs Help

The most common reactions that people have to disasters are post traumatic stress, depression and anxiety. It is normal for children to express fear and anxiety after a disaster. One of the most common ways that children express their fears is having difficulty sleeping. Children may refuse to go to bed, stay up later than usual, and be unwilling to sleep in their own rooms or by themselves. They may ask to sleep in their parents' bed, with the light on or waking up earlier than usual. Sleep terrors, nightmares, continued waking at night, and refusal to fall asleep may require professional help. Talk to the school counselor, your pediatrician or clergy. The signs and symptoms that appear are usually short lived and go away with reassurance and extra tender loving care. They may also reappear during hurricane season, thunderstorms, weather warnings or watches.

Very young children under the age of five express themselves without talking. The routines and environments that made them feel safe have been disrupted.

Therefore, they will show regressive behaviors like bedwetting, thumb sucking, and excessive whining which they may have outgrown prior to the disaster.

Disruption in school routines, separation from friends, loss of pets and special collections are very important to elementary aged kids. We can expect to see a number of problems begin

### Preschool (Ages Birth thru Five)

crying whimpering, screaming, and explicit cries for help  
becoming immobile  
trembling and frightened expressions  
running toward the adult or aimlessly  
excessive clinging  
marked sensitivity to loud noises  
weather fears - lightning, rain, high winds  
irritability  
confusion  
sadness, over loss of persons or prized possessions  
speech difficulties  
eating problems

to emerge at school. Regressive behaviors as stated above may resurface. School refusal, fear of the weather and other fears may surface.

Clinging to parents, teachers and older siblings may occur. Again use your judgment if you feel the behaviors are excessive and have lasted longer than a month seek professional help for your child or student.

Adolescents present a very self assured persona to others. They may not talk about or show their fears and anxieties. Instead, they may begin to act out, become isolated or turn to alcohol and drugs in more extreme cases. The adolescent may become too independent and rebellious. On the opposite extreme, the adolescent may become dependent on family and withdraw from peers becoming isolated at home. Again significant changes in behavior may require outside help. Junior High and High School students like adults

may also express their fears through physical problems like headaches, muscle pains or stomach aches. In addition, they may show signs of depression



### Elementary Age (Ages Six thru Eleven)






weather fears  
irrational fears (e.g., safety of buildings, or fear of lights in the sky)  
irritability  
disobedience  
depression  
excessive clinging  
headaches  
nausea  
visual or hearing problems  
behavior problems in school  
poor school performance  
fighting  
withdrawal of interest  
inability to concentrate  
distractibility  
peer problems

### Adolescence (Ages 12 through 17)







withdrawal and isolation  
physical complaints (e.g., headaches or stomach pain)  
depression and sadness  
antisocial behavior (e.g., stealing, aggressive behavior, or acting out)  
school problems (e.g., disruptive behavior or avoidance)  
decline in academic performance  
sleep disturbances (e.g., withdrawal into heavy sleep, sleep terrors, or sleeplessness)  
confusion  
risk taking behavior  
alcohol and other drug use  
avoidance of developmentally appropriate separations

## How Parents and Caretakers Can Help

Children can be very adaptive. It is important to remember that children are very important members of the family. Keep them informed and involved in planning for a disaster or in family decisions during the recovery. The following tips are taken from the University of Illinois website and issued by Aaron Ebata, Extension Specialist, and University of Illinois. Adapted from information developed by the Clemson University Extension Service and the Kansas State University Cooperative Extension Service. March 1997.

-  **Make time to comfort and reassure your children.** The stress of coping with adversity can be distracting for adults. Who has time to comfort a child when the flood water is rising? Just a moment of your time, a gentle hug, or a reassuring word may be all children need to feel safer and secure in an emotional situation.
-  **Speak simply and honestly about the situation.** Explain to your children what is happening to your family. Use simple words they can understand. Be honest. With a preschool child use words like, "Jenny, we have to leave our home for a while because the water is getting higher and is going to come into our house. We cannot stay. We are going to aunt Mary's house for a while." Do not sugar coat a grim situation. Do not exaggerate. Keep children informed of a problem that will directly affect them.
-  **Help young children understand the disaster.** Children are frightened by things they don't understand. You can explain how tornados, storms, or hurricanes are formed, and how these are unusual but natural patterns of weather. Children should know that they were not responsible for causing a disaster and that disasters are not some kind of punishment for something they did.
-  **Reassure children about the family safety.** Because young children sometimes have difficulty understanding complex situations, they can easily exaggerate their normal fear of being separated from their parents. Reassure them with statements like, "Yes, the water is dangerous. But you and Mommy, and Daddy, and your little brother will be safe. The Red Cross will find us a safe place to stay until the water goes back down."
-  **Maintain routines or rituals of comfort.** Dinnertime at the kitchen table, a bedtime story, an afternoon nap or a favorite teddy at bedtime may provide young children with a sense of security. Older children have their own routines





and favorite activities as well. Crisis activity and relocation can cause severe stress with any person because of the disruption of the familiar. Maintaining some routine activities and rituals of comfort during disruptive times can provide children with a sense of stability and control.

-  **Talk with children about how you feel and suggest a positive response.** Say something like, "Mommy feels very sad about leaving home. Very sad. That is why I am crying. Come and give Mommy a hug." Giving children something to do makes them feel a part of the family response to the adversity.
-  **Put words of acceptance to your children's feelings and experiences.** Say something similar to "Yes Tommy. It's okay to cry. Taffy (the family pet) will come back to our house when we return too. She will be fine at Uncle Ned's. He will take very good care of her." You do not have to "fix" how the child feels. Be a good listener and supporter.
-  **Give children something productive to do appropriate for their age.** Making them a part of the family's disaster efforts can give them a sense of control and contribution. Helping make sandwiches, carrying water, or filling sandbags help children feel a part of their family. Keep them involved in a safe way. Let them know you appreciate their efforts to help the family. Be sure not to overburden them with responsibilities, however, and remember that they need time to play and be with friends.
-  **Show children models of courage, determination, coping, and support.** Draw children's attention to those within and outside of the family who face the adversity or who provide support. "Daddy is doing all he can, Ivani. He was up all night putting sandbags around the house. Our neighbors are doing the same. We are all working together." Point out ways of coping that you use. "When I feel sad I think of the good times we have had and remind myself that things will be better soon".
-  **Take time to calm yourself.** Take a brief break from the crisis. Take a two-minute walk to cool off and calm down. Try for just a few moments to relax mentally. You will be able to provide more support to your family if you do.
-  **Seek professional support if needed.** If you are worried about your child showing symptoms that are severe or lasting too long, seek professional advice from your minister, physician, or mental health agency. You can also get referrals from your local Cooperative Extension Service or American Red Cross office.



## How Teachers Can Help

Teachers are very important in a child's life. School is a "home away from home" and it is critical given the severe impact that Katrina has had on everyone that the teachers help children prepare for and recover from this disaster through the educational process. Teachers can:

-  **Conduct classroom activities that can help children cope** with the trauma of a disaster or its aftermath by sharing their experiences and expressing their fears or concerns.
-  **Conduct study projects or multidisciplinary units focused on disasters** as a way of integrating learning across the curriculum. Students can learn and apply math, science, and language skills in exploring the causes and consequences of natural disasters.
-  **Introduce units on disaster preparedness** or health and safety to give students a sense of competence, confidence, and control in being able to handle disasters in the future
-  **Organize or encourage service projects** that give children the opportunity to use their skills and to help their family, school, or community prepare for or recover from natural disasters.

Age-specific Activities for Children in Disasters		
Preschoolers	Elementary (grades K-5)	Middle/Junior High to High School (grades 6-12)
Draw-a-picture	Draw-a-picture	Art, music, dance
Tell-a-story	Tell-a-story	Stories, essays, poetry, video production
Coloring books on disaster and loss	Books on disaster and loss	Books on disaster and loss
Doll, toy play	Create a play or puppet show about a disaster	Create a play, puppet show, or video about a disaster
Group games	Create a game about a disaster, disaster preparedness, or disaster recovery	Group discussions about disaster, disaster preparedness, or disaster recovery
Talks about disaster safety and self-protection	School study projects	School projects on health or natural and social sciences
-	Materials about disaster safety and self and family protection	Materials about disaster safety and self, family, and community protection
-	-	School service projects

Reprinted and adapted from Lystad, M. (Ed.). (1990). *Innovations in Mental Health Services to Disaster Victims* (DHHS Publication No. ADM 90-1390). Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office