



NYU Child Study Center
Giving Children Back Their Childhood

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The Psychological Effects of Hurricane Katrina for Child and Adolescent Survivors
prepared by the staff of the NYU Child Study Center

The effects of witnessing and/or being a victim of Hurricane Katrina will vary for children depending on their age, how they experienced the event, their ability to understand what is going on around them, and whether they were or are currently separated from parents or other primary care providers. Children who have lost or are separated from their primary caregivers and children who were experiencing emotional or physical difficulties prior to Hurricane Katrina are particularly at risk for symptoms of traumatic stress, depression and anxiety. While children of all ages may experience a range of reactions, below are some of the most common reactions for children of different ages:

Infancy to Age 3

- Increasing crying
- Repeatedly searching for caregivers
- Clinging
- Sleep disturbances
- Regression to earlier behaviors (such as bedwetting, thumb sucking)
- Repetitive talk or play

3-5 Year Olds

- Fear of being separated from caregivers
- Sleep disturbances
- Tantrums
- Irritability
- Withdrawal
- Increase in fears
- Magical thinking (believing that a deceased or missing person will suddenly appear)
- Acting as though a deceased person is still alive
- Crying

6-9 Year Olds

- Denial
- Irritability/opposition to authority
- Fighting, bullying
- Withdrawal
- Fear of separation
- Physical complaints (headache, stomachache)
- Sleep disturbance

School refusal, academic decline, memory problems
Crying

9-12 Year Olds

Crying
Aggression, irritability
Resentment
Sadness and withdrawal
Increased anxiety, including panic
Sleep disturbance
Physical complaints (headache, stomachache)
Self blame, guilt
Exaggerated attempts to protect caregivers and family members
School refusal, academic decline, memory problems

13-18 Year Olds

Re-experiencing the event (flashbacks)
Numbing and avoidance of difficult memories or feelings
Sadness and withdrawal
Loss of Trust
Resentment
Guilt and shame
Anger
Acting out (engaging in risky or anti-social behavior)
Exaggerated euphoria
Substance use
Fear of similar events in the future
School refusal, academic decline, memory problems

Other Hurricane Katrina Related Articles

[The Mental Health Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina: How Can We Help Children get Back on Their Feet?](#)

[Helping Children Cope with the Effects of Hurricane Katrina: Tips for Parents and Other Caregivers](#)

[Children's Responses to Hurricane Katrina: Tips for Schools and Teachers](#)

[Talking to Kids about Natural Disasters](#)

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