

HOW TO HELP CHILDREN AFTER A DISASTER.



It's important to remember that some children may never show distress, while others may not give evidence of being upset for several weeks or even months.

HOW CHILDREN MAY REACT.

- Be upset over the loss of a favorite toy, blanket, etc, which is important to them.
- Change from being quiet, obedient and caring to loud, noisy and aggressive, or change from being outgoing to shy and afraid.
- Develop night-time fear, (nightmares, fear of the dark or sleeping alone).
- Be afraid the event will reoccur.
- Become easily upset, crying and whining.
- Lose trust in adults. After all, their adults were not able to control the disaster.
- Revert to younger behavior (bed wetting, thumb sucking).
- Want to stay close to parents. Refuse to go to school or day care.
- Feel they caused the disaster because of something they said or did.
- Become afraid of wind, rain or sudden loud noises.
- Have symptoms of illness, such as head aches, vomiting or fever.
- Worry about where they and their family will live.

HOW PARENTS MAY HELP.

- Talk with the children about how they are feeling. Assure them that it is OK to have those feelings.
- Help the children to use words that express their feelings, such as "happy," "sad," "angry," etc.
- Children should not be expected to be brave or tough. Tell them it is OK to cry.
- Don't give children more information than they can handle about the disaster.
- Assure fearful children you will be there to care for them; consistently reassure them.

- Go back to former routines as soon as possible. Maintain a regular schedule for the children.
- Reassure the children that the disaster was not their fault.
- Let the children have some control, such as choosing clothing or what meal to have for dinner.
- Re-establish contact with extended family.
- Help your children learn to trust adults again by keeping promises you make.
- Help your children regain faith in the future by making plans.
- Get needed health care as soon as possible.
- Spend extra time with the children at bedtime.
- Make sure the children eat healthy meals and get enough rest.
- Allow special privileges for a short period of time, such as leaving the light on when they go to bed.
- Find ways to emphasize to the children that you love them.
- Allow the children time to grieve losses.
- Develop positive anniversary activities to commemorate the event. These may bring tears, but they are also a time to celebrate survival and the ability to get back to a normal life.