



Helping Children and Teens Recover from a Disaster or Emergency

Like an adult, your child can have a delayed stress reaction to what they've been through. Changes in behaviour can be part of how they cope. With care, attention, and understanding from parents and caregivers, symptoms of stress often go away on their own over time.

Common Stress Reactions

Children up to 11 years may:

- have changes in eating habits (e.g., refusing to eat, picky)
- have changes in sleeping habits (e.g., scared to sleep alone, trouble falling or staying asleep)
- whine or cry more than usual
- be afraid to be alone (e.g., always want to be with parent or caregiver)
- develop new fears (e.g., strangers, animals, sounds that remind them of the event)
- go back to younger behaviours (e.g., thumb sucking, bed-wetting and daytime accidents)
- withdraw or become quieter than usual
- have problems concentrating or following instructions
- Have temper tantrums, act out or fight more with friends and siblings
- have problems at school or not want to go to school
- talk about the event often or repeat the same scenes of the event when playing

Tips

- Provide reassurance and extra comfort (e.g., "I'm here.", extra hugs or cuddles).
- Allow them to talk about the event and answer questions. Be patient and kind when explaining and talking about the same thing several times.
- Try to return to your regular routines as much as you can (e.g., meal and bedtime routines). This can provide comfort and help your child feel safe and secure.
- Be patient with changes in their behaviour (e.g., bed-wetting, crying, tantrums).
- Make short-term changes to sleeping routines (e.g., night light, extra bedtime stories, staying with them until they fall asleep).
- Encourage playtime and physical activity. Set-up play-dates with friends and family.
- Involve them in making and practicing a safety plan for future disasters.

Teens 12 years and older may:

- have changes in eating habits (e.g., too much or too little)
- have changes in sleeping habits (e.g., too much or too little)
- act out or have aggressive behaviours
- have trouble with school
- have physical symptoms (e.g., headaches, general aches and pains, bowel problems)
- have changes in mood and energy
- lose interest in social activities, withdraw from friends or family
- be easily influenced (e.g., give in to group or peer pressure)

Tips

- Spend extra time together (e.g., play games, go for a walk).
- Lighten your expectations at school and at home.
- Allow them to help with recovery activities in the community (e.g., cleanup work, rebuilding activities). This will help create connections and provide a sense of purpose.
- Encourage them to connect with their friends and family, either in-person or through technology (e.g., phone, text, video chat). Having a strong social support network with healthy social connections will help them cope and recover.
- When they're ready, talk about the things that you learned from the disaster and how to prepare for any future events. Planning for future disasters is a key part of recovery.

Tips for Parents and Caregivers

Look after yourself. Get enough sleep, eat well, drink water, be active, and take some time for yourself.

Ask for help. It's okay to ask for help when you need it. Get the support you need from family, friends, cultural or faith groups, and healthcare providers.

Name your feelings. Ask yourself if your thoughts, feelings, actions, or reactions are different than normal and try to understand why. This can help you understand and cope with your child's behaviours and feelings.

Model good coping skills. Your child sees your emotions through your words, facial expressions, and actions. If you have strong emotions, it's okay. Name them (e.g., "I feel angry. I feel frustrated. I feel sad."). Talk about how you feel and how you're going to cope so that your child can learn how to do the same.

If you're not sure how to support your child or if you're concerned about how they're coping, talk to a health or social care provider or call Health Link at 811.



Important Numbers Available 24/7

Health Link
811

Addiction Helpline
1-866-332-2322

Mental Health Helpline
1-877-303-2642



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Produced by Mental Health Promotion & Illness Prevention

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Item #: DR009; Version: 02; Revised: 2020-03

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