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11 Tips for Helping Children Who Have Experienced a Disaster

Here are some ideas to use at home/school.

1 **Provide loving, nurturing comfort and care.** Offer extra hugs and closeness.

2 **Answer children's questions directly, honestly, and age appropriately.** Explain disaster-related language in terms children will understand. Don't offer more information than children are interested in, and don't force children to talk. Be prepared to answer the same questions over and over.

3 **Review with children their daily schedule— wake up, go to school, play and learn at school, pickup, dinner, and bedtime.** Routines make children feel secure.

4 **Remind children that their parents will be there at the end of the day.** Establish or strengthen rituals to reinforce this: "When you finish the afternoon meeting, it will be time to take the bus home."

5 **Encourage children to express their emotions—even anger.** Help children understand their feelings and find healthy outlets for them. Provide lots of art materials, sand and water play, dance, and dramatic play where children can safely express sadness or anger.

6 **Come up with projects where children help others affected by a traumatic event, such as making get well cards for people in the hospital.** Helping activities build compassion and give children a sense of control.

7 **Reassure children that they're safe, and point out all the ways that parents and teachers make them safe.** Post, review, and practice evacuation plans with the children.

8 **Offer stress-reducing activities such as yoga, meditation, and mindfulness exercises.**

9 **Create cozy spaces where children can be alone, be sad, be angry, or think about things.** Add beanbag chairs, pillows, and stuffed animals for comfort.

10 **Read aloud books about disasters, such as *Freddy the Frogcaster and the Huge Hurricane*, by Janice Dean, to encourage discussion.** Offer appropriate comments: "The frog in the story is very helpful. There were lots of kind people who helped us after the hurricane."

11 **Point out good things that have happened, such as people helping each other and the community banding together.**