



Image courtesy of Save the Children USA

HOW TO HELP CHILDREN COPE IN EMERGENCIES

Many parents, teachers, grandparents and caregivers are concerned about how experiencing emergencies and seeing dramatic images of emergencies can affect the emotional well-being of their children.

To help provide guidance, Save the Children has prepared the following 10 tips. They can be used by adults to support children through any emergency. These tips are based on Save the Children's years of national and international experience in supporting children in emergencies.

Save the Children recommends parents, teachers, grandparents and caregivers:

- 1. Listen to your children carefully.** Try to find out what your child knows and understands about the emergency before responding to their questions. Children can experience stress when they do not understand dangerous experiences. Find out what your child knows about the emergency. Then, talk to your child to help him or her understand the situation and ease their concerns.
- 2. Give children reassurance.** Tell children that adults are doing everything they can to protect and help children who have been affected by the emergency. Also, let them know that if an emergency happens, your main concern would be their safety. Make sure they know they are being protected.
- 3. Be alert for significant changes in behaviour.** Caregivers should be alert to any significant changes in children's sleeping patterns, eating habits, and concentration levels. Also watch for wide emotional swings or frequent physical complaints. If any of these actions do happen, they will likely lessen within a short time. If they continue, however, you should seek professional help for the child.

- 4. Limit television time.** While it can be important for adults to stay informed about the emergency, television images and reports may be confusing and frightening for children. Watching too many television reports of the emergency can overwhelm children and even adults. So, limit the number of television reports about the emergency you and your children watch.
- 5. Understand children's unique needs.** Not every child will experience an emergency in the same way. As children develop, their intellectual, physical and emotional abilities change. Younger children will depend largely on their parents to interpret events; older children and adolescents will get information from various sources, such as friends and the media. Remember that children of any age can be affected by an emergency. Provide them all with love, understanding and support.
- 6. Give your children extra time and attention.** Children need close personal attention to know they are safe. Talk, play and, most importantly, listen to them. Find time to engage in special activities with children of all ages.
- 7. Be a model for your children.** Your children will learn how to deal with these events by seeing how you respond. The amount you tell children about how you're feeling should depend on the age and maturity of the child. You may be able to disclose more to older or more mature children but remember to do so calmly.
- 8. Watch your own behaviour.** Make a point of being sensitive to those impacted by the emergency. This is an opportunity to teach your children that we all need to help each other.
- 9. Help your children return to a normal routine.** Children usually benefit from routine activities such as set eating times, bed time, and playing with others. Parents should make sure their children's school is also returning to normal patterns and not spending a lot of time discussing the emergency.
- 10. Encourage your children to do volunteer work.** Helping others can give children a sense of control and security and promote helping behaviour. During an emergency, children and adolescents can bring about positive change by supporting those in need.

Save the Children urges adults to seek out and follow the guidance of the Emergency Services and Local Authorities to help ensure the safety of their children.