



Supporting Children Following a Hurricane

Children will have many questions during and after a hurricane or other damaging storm and will often repeat questions even if they've already been answered. Although this can feel frustrating to caregivers, it can help to remember this is their way of attempting to make sense of a scary and unpredictable situation.

One way of alleviating children's anxiety is to make it clear that caregivers are open to answering any questions they may have, and even if they don't have an immediate answer, they will do their best to give them as much information as possible. It is often best to allow children to take the lead in having these discussions. Young children can only absorb small pieces of information at a time and may feel overwhelmed if provided with too much information at once.

Below are some tips for caregivers to help facilitate children's adjustment after a storm or hurricane:

- Although easier said than done, **try to remain calm**. Children are extremely tuned into adults' reactions during stressful times, and they will often model their own behavior/coping based on what they observe.
- **Limit and/or supervise media exposure** as much as possible. Often the media will show disturbing images and descriptions of the hurricane and its damage, which can again increase children's anxiety. Sometimes children don't have a good idea about distance or time and might misunderstand when and where events shown are happening.
- **Reassure children** that they will be safe and protected. This may need to be repeated frequently even after the storms pass.
- As difficult as this may be, try to **stick to regular routines** as much as possible (e.g., eating dinner at the same time, same bedtime routine, etc.). This can help to provide children with a sense of order, predictability and control. Children feel more secure with structure and familiar routine.
- Help to **keep comforting objects** close (e.g., a stuffed animal or blanket). You may need to provide some **extra support at bedtime**, as this is most often the time when younger children will express fear/anxiety. Reading stories they enjoy and spending extra time cuddling can help.
- The hurricane/storms may have disrupted daily activities, and a loss of power may cause boredom. You can help kids by **coming up with alternative activities** such as board games, card games, arts and crafts. Many games such as "I Spy", "Simon Says", "Charades" and other games don't require materials.
- **Remain optimistic**. Even in the most stressful and difficult situation, your hopeful outlook will go a long way toward helping your children feel confident and secure that things will be OK.
- **Take care of yourself**. Parents, caregivers, and early childhood program staff are key parts of helping children to cope in adaptive ways. It is important that they get the support they need make sure to stay healthy to ensure they are ready and able to help children.

References:

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