

9. PROVIDE THE CHILD WITH PLENTY OF TIME TO PLAY

Play is a child's natural way of communicating. It provides a powerful way for a child to tell the story of what is happening to them. Active play that provides exercise is a great way to cope with stress. Playing with friends can also be a healthy distraction from dealing with the harsh reality of the hurricane.

10. HELP CREATE A SENSE OF SAFETY

To help create a sense of safety, reassure children regularly with statements such as "I'll do everything I can to keep you safe." and "Everybody gets scared, and I am here to help you."

Create a safe place where children can go for quiet time or special time with loved ones. Encourage children to think about things or special places that help them feel safe, happy, and loved. Take the time to listen and calmly respond to their questions.



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THE HURRICANE AFTERMATH: 10 WAYS FOR PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS TO HELP CHILDREN



With a disaster like the hurricane, adults and children should expect all kinds of feelings: shock, confusion, sadness, grief, anger, loneliness, and hopelessness. This pamphlet provides tips on beginning the healing and emotional recovery process.

1. TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF

To take care of children, it is very important to take care of yourself, too. Spending just 15 minutes each day on caring for yourself can significantly reduce your own stress.

Here are some suggestions for taking care of yourself:

- Take slow, deep breaths throughout the day
- Be aware of your body: stretch and exercise
- Seek alone time and quietness
- Ask for help
- Do your best with the basics: eat well and try to get enough sleep
- Renew yourself by visiting with friends and family; comfort yourself with faith, music, books, and nature
- Talk about your feelings with adults you trust. Cry whenever you need to.
- Find time to do things that are fun, creative, or interesting to you

2. FIND SOMETHING POSITIVE IN HOW THE CHILD IS DEALING WITH THE HURRICANE

During a disaster, a child needs to be encouraged: to feel valued and appreciated. One way to help a child feel proud is to tell him or her the ways in which they were helpful in dealing with the hurricane.

3. ENCOURAGE THE CHILD TO TALK, WRITE, OR DRAW ABOUT THEIR FEELINGS

Help children identify their feelings with saying statements such as, "You seem sad right now" or "It's ok to be angry. There are a lot of things to feel angry about..." Children tend to express themselves through their play, artwork, and by talking with friends and adults.

Talk with children, listen well, and accept their thoughts and feelings. Have pencils, paper, markers, etc. available to help them write or draw about their feelings.



4. ASK THE CHILD WHAT HE/SHE NEEDS

From time to time, ask children what they need. Based on how they are feeling, children may need a loving hug, time to play, special attention, help with homework, or other needs.

Sometimes they need things you simply can't provide for them right now. There may be other needs you can meet. But simply asking children what they need allows them to feel valued and cared for.

5. BE AWARE OF COMMON REACTIONS TO TRAUMA

Each child is unique in how he or she may respond to a traumatic event like a hurricane. Children may respond to trauma with some of the following common reactions:

- Nail biting or thumb-sucking
- Whining
- Clinging
- Acting/talking younger than their age
- Loud or aggressive behavior at home or school
- Wanting a lot of attention, or wanting to be alone
- Nightmares, night terrors, and fears of the dark
- Avoiding school
- Loss of interest and poor concentration in school
- Headaches, stomachaches, or other body complaints
- Cranky, irritable, or angry
- Depressed
- Fearful

These can all be normal responses to trauma. The key, however, is to look for changes that have occurred in the child's behavior since the hurricane.

6. BE PREPARED TO DEAL WITH PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS LIKE STOMACH-ACHES AND HEADACHES

Help children find ways to comfort and soothe themselves when they feel scared or worried. Some ideas for soothing include: reading stories, back rubs, gentle music, and eating comfort foods. Provide assurance to children that they will be okay, and you will be okay. They may need to be reassured with both words and hugs.

7. CHILDREN LIKE ROUTINES

Families have gone through so many changes as a result of the hurricane. Children need a sense that some things are going to stay the same. You can help them recover from trauma by providing some structure in their everyday routines.

A consistent routine might include having the child go to bed and wake up at the same time each day, creating a quiet time each day, or a time for playing or talking together.



8. LIMIT THE CHILD'S EXPOSURE TO NEWS ABOUT THE HURRICANE

Children need breaks from coping with trauma. Limit exposure to television or radio news about the hurricane for younger children. Take care to protect them from adult conversations that may be overwhelming.

With older children you may choose to be present during their exposure to such information and to address specific questions or concerns they may have.