



your actions, you can set an example for your children of how to handle these reactions in a productive way.

encouraging children to help.

Children can and should help in the cleaning and rebuilding that needs to be done. If your family has been spared from severe losses, you may want to encourage your children to offer help or give a donation to others in need.

preparing.

If you start now, you can prevent the upsetting reactions that can occur when an event may trigger memories of the emergency. You can tell your children what to expect and what to do to handle that situation.

seeking help if your children are suffering severe problems.

If your children have had serious losses, such as the death of a loved one, or the destruction of a home or farm, they may need more help. See a professional if they are having extreme reactions to the emergency, such as repeated nightmares, flashbacks, crying spells, behavior problems, and panic reactions. Talk to your child’s pediatrician, teacher, or school counselor for a recommendation.



Institute
for Infrastructure
and Information Assurance
at James Madison University

The Institute for Infrastructure and Information Assurance (IIIA) at James Madison University (JMU) integrates and supports the university’s efforts in the increasingly vital area of homeland security. IIIA actively seeks research sponsorship and provides funding for cutting edge research within the broad context of improving the nation’s security. Providing a balance between physical and cyber security is one of the main goals of IIIA’s research agenda along with providing policy and technological solutions to the security issues facing our nation. JMU is currently closely partnering with George Mason University on the Critical Infrastructure Protection Program and National Capital Region Assessment Project, both of which directly address preparedness and security issues impacting rural and urban areas.

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Education ♦ Planning ♦ Preparedness

After the Disaster: A Guide for Handling Stress in Children



Prepared for *Protecting Ourselves:
A Rural Citizen’s Guide for Emergency Preparedness* by the
Institute for Infrastructure & Information Assurance
at James Madison University.

When confronting an emergency, such as a natural disaster, catastrophe or act of terrorism, you naturally take immediate action to protect your children from any potential threat. Afterwards, even when your children are now safe, they may have some common responses to this event.



After the emergency, do your children have...

a need to talk about it?

Your children may want to tell what happened again and again. Even generally quiet children may talk

a lot about what they saw, felt and did during the emergency.

nightmares and trouble sleeping?

Your children may be afraid to go to sleep or wake up frightened from bad dreams.

fears of being alone?

Some children are afraid of being left alone anywhere, even if it's only in another room at home. Yours may cling to you and may even want to sleep with you at night. They may be afraid of leaving home to go to school.

worries and fears?

Children may pay closer attention to the news and weather reports now. When they feel a gust of wind or see a few raindrops, they may become nervous. And if the weather turns bad or the news sounds grim, children may panic that another emergency is on the way.

vivid memories of the emergency?

Children can picture in their minds detailed scenes from the emergency. Many different sights, sounds or smells can easily trigger these memories in your children.

trouble sitting still?

Your children may now be more active, have problems paying attention, and be more impatient.

upset feelings or no feelings at all?

Some children are easily upset or feel apathetic. Many express concern about the welfare of others, particularly other young ones.

physical problems?

Your child may suffer from headaches, stomach aches, nausea, and fatigue.



These are just some of the common, temporary reactions children can have to an emergency. Keep in mind that these are normal responses to an abnormal event. Fortunately, there are some simple steps you can take to help your children through these difficult times.

You can help your children by...

listening.

It may be painful, but the best thing you can do for children is to listen to them talk about the emergency. Younger children may be drawing pictures of the emergency or acting it out in their play. Talking, drawing and play-acting are healthy and natural ways for children to work through their reactions.

comforting.

Feel free to hold and comfort your children more during this time. They are reaching out to you for security right now, and a little extra love and affection won't spoil them.

reassuring.

You can also reassure your children that they are now safe. Remind them that they can take precautions to protect themselves from bad weather, even when it's severe, and acts of violence.

teaching.

Emergencies are opportunities for children to learn the most important lessons of life – what it means to be part of a loving family and caring community. Take advantage of this chance to teach your children these basics.

praising.

Children often show strengths, such as compassion, courage and hope, in troubled times. You can point with pride to their acts of generosity, hard work and patience. Be generous with your praise.

not being over-protective.

This may be the most difficult for you to do, but you must fight the temptation to over-protect your children. It may be very hard even to let them out of your sight, but its important that they return to a regular routine as soon as possible.

being a good example.

Actions speak louder than words, and by

