

Caring for Children in a Disaster

Disasters affect children differently than they do adults.

Children's bodies are different from adults' bodies.

- They are more likely to get sick or severely injured.
- They breathe in more air per pound of body weight than adults do.
- They have thinner skin, and more of it per pound of body weight (higher surface-to-mass ratio).
- Fluid loss (e.g. dehydration, blood loss) can have a bigger effect on children because they have less fluid in their bodies.
- They are more likely to lose too much body heat.
- Children need help from adults in an emergency.
- They don't fully understand how to keep themselves safe.
- Older children and adolescents may take their cues from others, young children may freeze, cry, or scream.
- They may not be able to explain what hurts or bothers them.
- They feel less of a sense of control.
- They understand less about the situation.
- They have fewer experiences bouncing back from hard situations.



What You Can Do to Help Children Cope with a Disaster

Setting a good example for your children by managing your stress through healthy lifestyle choices, such as eating healthy, exercising regularly, getting plenty of sleep, and avoiding drugs and alcohol, is critical for parents and caregivers. When you are prepared, rested, and relaxed you can respond better to unexpected events and can make decisions in the best interest of your family and loved ones.

The following tips can help reduce stress before, during, and after a disaster or traumatic event.

Before

Talk to your children so that they know you are prepared to keep them safe.

Review safety plans before a disaster or emergency happens. Having a plan will increase your children's confidence and help give them a sense of control

During

Stay calm and reassure your children.

Talk to children about what is happening in a way that they can understand. Keep it simple and appropriate for each child's age.

After

Provide children with opportunities to talk about what they went through or what they think about it. Encourage them to share concerns and ask questions.

You can help your children feel a sense of control and manage their feelings by encouraging them to take action directly related to the disaster. For example, children can help others after a disaster, including volunteering to help community or family members in a safe environment. Children should NOT participate in disaster cleanup activities for [health](#) and [safety](#) reasons.

For more information, please visit <https://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/helping-children-cope.html>