

## Talking to Children about Disasters

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Natural disasters, refugees displaced from their homes, loss of life . . . even for adults, these tragic events are difficult to understand. Children, too, may find these incidents especially troubling. Adults can help young people make sense of disasters and deal with their feelings by following a few guidelines.

For example, don't assume that children don't know what is going on. Children learn of disasters through TV, the Internet, and

their friends at school. So, be available and ready to talk. Help children open up by listening to what they think and feel. Answer their questions, but don't give them frightening details.

Let them feel anger and sadness. When we are trying to protect our children, we may not want to hear all their feelings. Hang in there . . .listen and be supportive.

Share your feelings. Sometimes children may feel alone in their struggles. Let them know that you are upset by the events and tell them how you deal with your feelings. This can help children learn coping skills.

Reassure children and help them feel safe. Children often imagine that the same thing could happen to them. If they really are not in the line of danger, let them know that they are not at risk. Tell them that you love them, no matter what happens in the world.

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Encourage children to find ways to help others, and join in. Taking action, such as raising money for a charity, can reduce stress, helps those affected by a disaster, and instills hope for the future.

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## Reference

Myers-Walls, J. (2005). *Talking with children when the talking gets tough*. Retrieved August 7, 2007, from <http://www.ces.purdue.edu/cfs/topics/HD/TalkChildrenTalkGetsTough.pdf>.