

## The Media

Although you need to stay informed, seeing or hearing information about a disaster or emergency over and over may be confusing and frightening for children. Watching too many reports can be overwhelming for children and teens.

- Limit how much to media your child sees or hears (e.g., graphic images, tv, radio).
- If you do watch or listen to reports on disasters or emergencies with your child. Afterwards, talk about what they saw and heard.



**1-877-303-2642**

**Mental Health Help Line**  
Mental Health Support 24/7

**1-800-668-6868**

**Kids Help Phone**  
[www.KidsHelpPhone.ca](http://www.KidsHelpPhone.ca)

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## Helping Your Child or Teen Respond to a Disaster or Emergency



While you can't control a stressful situation, you can control how you **REACT** to it.

**R**espond. How you respond to the stress of a disaster or emergency can affect how your child reacts. Reacting in calm and productive ways (e.g., discussing things calmly, problem-solving, looking after yourself) will model good coping skills. It will help your child feel calmer and cope better.

**E**at at regular times to give your body the energy and nutrients it needs to cope in stressful situations. Drink water throughout the day to stay focused. Take time to eat meals with your children, friends, and family. Sharing a meal can increase your sense of belonging and connection with others.

**A**ctivity. Make time to be physically active with your child, go for a walk, dance, or play. Physical activity is a good way to connect with your child and can help reduce their anxiety and stress.

**C**onnect with other caregivers, families, and peers in the community. This will help you and your child to respond and cope better with a disaster. Find ways to help others when you can and accept help from others when you need it.

**T**alk. Let your child know it's okay to talk about what is going on. When they ask questions, listen without interrupting and answer honestly at a level they can understand (e.g., "There is a fire near our town. People are working hard to put it out. We are safe and away from it. I will be here with you all the time."). If you don't know an answer to their question, it's okay to say that.

## Stress Reactions

Children react to disasters and emergencies differently than adults do. Your child may feel and act differently because they might not understand what is happening.

### Common stress reactions

#### Children under 5 years may:

- cry more than usual
- have changes to eating habits
- complain about aches or pains
- be confused easily
- want to be held more
- be afraid to be alone
- have trouble talking (e.g., stuttering)

#### Children 6 to 11 years may:

- go back to doing things they did when younger (e.g., thumb sucking)
- have changes in sleeping patterns (e.g., trouble falling or staying asleep, scared to sleep alone)
- have trouble concentrating
- complain of a headache or stomach ache
- be whiny, act out, or have aggressive behaviour
- ask about spiritual beliefs

#### Teens 12 to 18 years may:

- have changes in sleeping patterns (e.g., too much or too little)
- complain of aches and pains, headaches, or stomach problems
- become withdrawn or quiet
- act out or have aggressive behaviour
- question their spiritual beliefs
- feel guilty about surviving (if people have been hurt or have died)
- have trouble with existing medical problems

## Helping Your Child Cope

Any change in a child's environment or routine can make the child feel insecure, scared, or confused.

### Tips

- Teach them that all emotions are okay. Help them name their feelings and understand how emotions make their body feel.
- Encourage them to share their feelings and concerns. Listen and validate what they're saying (e.g., "You're feeling sad that you lost your stuffy. That doesn't feel good.>").
- Offer extra comfort and reassurance when they need it (e.g., stay with them, give hugs, let them know they're safe and that their safety is your main concern).
- Help them see the positive things that are happening (e.g., people are kind and are helping each other).
- Do things to stay busy (e.g., play games, colour, do puzzles, go for a walk).
- For younger children, it's important to have time to play and connect with other kids.
- Older children and teens might want to do things to help during a disaster. This will help them feel in control and provide them with a sense of purpose.
- Encourage teens to connect with their friends or other kids their age.
- Allow for quiet time. If your child is feeling overwhelmed, try to find a quiet spot for a few minutes where you can comfort them.

