

Message from the Parish Nurses

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HELPING CHILDREN COPE WITH DISASTER

Disasters can leave children and teens feeling frightened, confused, and insecure. Children's responses can be quite varied depending on their age. It's important to learn how to recognize these reactions in order to better help them cope with their emotions. Children base their reactions in part on what they see from the adults around them. They can detect adults' uncertainty, fear, and grief. When parents, caregivers, and teachers are able to deal with a disaster calmly and confidently they can make disasters less traumatic for the children.

CHILDREN'S REACTION TO DISASTER

The following are some common physical and emotional reactions in children after a disaster or traumatic event. While these are typical, some children may exhibit none of these behaviors and others may behave in ways not mentioned here.

BIRTH TO 6 YEARS

- When children that are pre-verbal and experience a trauma, they don't have the words to describe the events or their feelings.
- They can retain memories of particular sights, sounds, or smells.
- Infants may become more cranky, crying more than usual, or wanting to be held and cuddled.
- Preschool and kindergarten children can feel helpless, powerless, and frightened about being separated from their parent or caregiver.
- They may return to bed-wetting and have a hard time sleeping.
- Their play activities may involve aspects of the event and reenact the incident or the disaster over and over again.

SCHOOL AGE – 7 TO 10 YEARS

- Older children who know about loss may feel sad, mad, or afraid the event will happen again.
- Other reactions could be guilt, feeling of failure, anger that the event wasn't prevented.
- Some children become intensely preoccupied with the details of a traumatic event and want to talk about it continually.
- This preoccupation can interfere with the child's

concentration at school and academic performance may decline.

- They may hear inaccurate information from their peers which parents or caregivers then would need to correct.

PRE-ADOLESCENCE TO ADOLESCENCE 11 TO 18 YEARS

- As children grow older, their responses begin to resemble adults' reaction to trauma. Much of adolescence is focused on moving out into the world.
- After a trauma, the world can seem dangerous and unsafe. They can feel overwhelmed by that intense emotion, yet unable to talk about their feelings.
- Survival of trauma can be equated with a sense of immortality. A teenager may become involved in dangerous, risk-taking behavior, such as reckless driving and alcohol or drug use.
- Others may become fearful of leaving home and avoid social activities.

MEETING THE CHILD'S EMOTIONAL NEEDS

It is important for parents and other caregivers to understand what is causing a child's anxieties and fears. Following a disaster, children are most afraid that:

- The event will happen again.
- Someone close to them will be killed or injured.
- They will be left alone or separated from their family.

REASSURE CHILDREN WITH COMPASSION AND UNDERSTANDING

- Hug and touch your child.
- Encourage your children to talk and listen to what they are saying.
- Calmly provide factual information about the disaster and plans for insuring their ongoing safety.
- Involve your children by giving them specific tasks to let them know they can help restore family and community life.
- Spend extra time with your children.
- Praise and recognize responsible behavior.
- Understand that your children will need to mourn their own losses.
- Re-establish daily routines for work, school, play, meals and rest.

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More information can be found at:

[www.redcross.org/Helping children cope with disaster](http://www.redcross.org/Helping_children_cope_with_disaster)

<https://www.ready.gov/kids/parents/coping>

<https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/children.asp>

Visit: www.StAgnesShepherdstown.org for

“PREPARE YOUR FAMILY FOR DISASTER”

Click on Parish Health Newsletter

PREPARE YOUR FAMILY FOR DISASTER

Preparing for disaster helps everyone in the family accept the fact that disasters do happen, and they can do something about it. Families should work together to identify and collect the resources needed to meet basic needs during and after disaster. When people feel prepared, they cope better.

GET INFORMED

- Learn about the emergency plans and procedures that exist in places you and your family spend time. Priority locations include places of employment, schools, and childcare centers.
- Publications are available on the World Wide Web at:
 - FEMA - www.fema.gov
 - www.ready.gov
 - American Red Cross - www.redcross.org
 - ReadyWV! - www.ready.wv.org
- Publications can be found in the St. Agnes narthex (where the bulletin board is located.)
 - Getting Ready: A Family Emergency Guide**
 - Prepare for Emergencies Now: Information to Get Ready**

CREATE A FAMILY DISASTER PLAN

- Discuss with your family the hazards that could impact our local area, the potential for community evacuation or sheltering, the warning systems and what to do if they are used.
- Determine where to meet in the event of an emergency. Designate one location right outside your home in case of a sudden emergency, like a fire, and another location outside your neighborhood in case you can't return home.
- Ask an out-of-town friend or relative to be your emergency contact. Following a disaster, family members should call this person and tell them where they are.
- Make a communication plan where all family members know how to contact each other. A form for recording this information can be found at www.ready.gov Or at www.redcross.org/contactcard.
- Include provisions for your pets in your family disaster plan.
- Practice the plan with your family.

ASSEMBLE A DISASTER SUPPLIES KIT

Every household should assemble a disaster supplies kit and keep it up to date. A disaster supplies kit can help

your family stay safe and be more comfortable during and after a disaster. Though local officials and relief workers will be on the scene after a disaster, they cannot reach everyone immediately. Also, if you need to evacuate at a moment's notice you probably will not have the opportunity to shop or reach for supplies you and your family will need.

- Pack disaster supplies in an easy-to-carry container, such as a duffel bag or backpack and label the container clearly.
- Ask your children to think of items that they like to include in the kit, such as books, games or nonperishable snack food items. For a small child, such items may include a favorite toy, blanket or other item that the child uses as a source of comfort when upset.
- Include such items as:
 - Three-day supply of non-perishable food and manual can opener.
 - Three-day supply of water (one gallon of water per person per day).
 - Portable, battery-powered radio and extra batteries.
 - Flashlights and extra batteries.
 - First Aid kit and first aid manual
 - Filter/Dust mask.
 - Photocopies of credit cards, identification cards, medical information, insurance cards, bank account records, medical and durable power of attorney and wills.
 - Sanitation and hygiene items, hand sanitizer, moist wipes, toilet paper, paper towels, garbage bags & ties.
 - Matches in a waterproof container.
 - Whistle.
 - Clothing, blankets, kitchen accessories and cooking utensils.
 - Prescription medications, spare eye-glasses, hearing aid batteries.
 - Items for infants, such as formula, diapers, bottles and pacifiers.
 - Tools, pet supplies, a map of the local area, and other items to meet your unique family needs.
- Ask your children to help you remember to keep your kit updated by marking dates on a calendar to regularly review and update your kit.
- Consider having emergency supplies in each vehicle and at your place of employment.

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Information is from all websites denoted on this page.