

## **Parent Guidelines for Helping Children after a Hurricane**

Children's reactions to the hurricane and its aftermath are strongly influenced by how their parents, teachers, and other caregivers cope during and after the storm. They often turn to these adults for information, comfort, and help. These generally diminish with time, but knowing that these reactions are likely – and normal – can help parents be prepared.

### **Common Reactions in Children**

- Feelings of anxiety, fear, and worry about safety of self and others (including pets)
- Increased fears and worries about separation from family members
- More clingy to parents, siblings, or teachers
- Fears about another hurricane coming
- Changes in behavior:
  - Increased activity level
  - Decreased concentration and attention
  - Increased irritability
  - Withdrawal
  - Angry outbursts
  - Aggression
- Increased physical complaints (e.g., headaches, stomachaches, aches and pains)
- Prolonged focus on the hurricane (e.g., talking repeatedly about it or including it in daily play)
- Increased sensitivity to sounds (e.g., thunder, wind, and other loud noises)
- Changes in sleep and/or appetite
- Lack of interest in usual activities, including interest in playing with friends

### **How Can I Help My Child?**

- Spend time talking with your child.
  - This will let your child know that it is OK to ask questions and to express their concerns. Children may have questions on more than one occasion. Use a calm tone of voice.
- Limit Your Children's Exposure to Media Coverage
  - Media coverage can produce increased fears and anxiety in children. Children may think the event is continuing to happen or is happening again.
- Monitor and avoid adult conversations (i.e. storm, hurricane) in front of children
- Reassure your children that many people and organizations are working together to help the community.
- Reassure children that they are safe.
  - This may need to be repeated many times following the hurricane. You should spend extra time with your children and stay connected. Don't minimize the child's feelings (i.e. "Stop being a baby, don't cry.")

## Things I Can Do for Myself

- In order to take good care of your children, you must take good care of yourself.
- These are typical reactions you may experience after a hurricane:
  - Neglecting own needs
  - Trouble focusing or paying attentions
  - Withdrawing from others or activities you usually like
  - Angry feelings/outbursts
- Take care of yourself physically. Be sure to eat, sleep and drink water. Also get proper medical care.
- Take a news break. Watching replays of footage from the hurricane can make your stress even greater.
- Stick to routine as much as possible.
- Give yourself a break. Try not to overdo clean-up activities after the hurricane.
- Focus on something practical that you can do right now to manage the situation better.
- You've tackled hardships at other times in your life. Tap into the skills you used to get through past challenges.
- Give yourself permission to feel moody or nervous.

**For more information contact:**



Address: 1441 Heritage Blvd, Immokalee FL 34142

Phone: 239-658-3087, 239-658-3056, 239-658-3099

Adapted from:

Managing Traumatic Stress: After the Hurricanes. American Psychological Association.

Parent Guidelines for Helping Children after a Hurricane. National Child Traumatic Stress Network.

Helping Young Children and Families Cope with Trauma. Harris Center for Infant Mental Health Violence Intervention Program & Safe Start. Louisiana State University Health Sciences Center New Orleans