



IMAGINE STEPPING INTO  
YOUR CHILD'S WORLD AND  
SEEING THINGS FROM HIS  
OR HER POINT OF VIEW.

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## In times of crisis

### Helping children feel safe: parenting in times of natural disasters

Natural disasters scare adults and children. They often hit without warning. Disasters scare children more because they lack the life skills and experience of adults. They don't know what is happening, what to do, or how to calm themselves. These suggestions might help if this happens to you:

**The last earthquake really worried my five year old son. I have tried to help him. What can I do?**

Children often think things are worse than they really are. Ask him why he doesn't feel safe. Have him tell you what would help him feel safe. You may not know why he is afraid. Drawings and toys can help children share feelings. Have your child draw or paint a picture about how he feels. This may tell you more than his words will. Usually, just knowing that parents are listening makes children feel better. For more information on helping your child share feelings see '*How to help your children cope during times of uncertainty*' in this series.

**During the last hurricane season we had to leave our home. Hurricane season is coming again and my ten-year-old daughter is very afraid. What can I do to help her feel safe?**

Children usually fear the unknown. Not knowing what will happen or what to do makes them feel helpless. To help your daughter over her fear, find ways that give her more control and a better understanding about the disaster.

***Here are some things you can do:***

- Teach her how hurricanes are made and that she cannot cause them.
- The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has a web site to help children prepare for emergencies. The site offers fun games and quizzes on all kinds of natural disasters. [<http://www.appl.fema.gov/kids/gamesl.htm>]. If you don't have a computer at home, visit your local library.
- Make a family plan for staying safe in any kind of disaster. Give each family member a job to do in case of a hurricane. Let your child help with the plan.

- Practice your plan.
- Make a Family Emergency Supply Kit. Include candles, matches, a flashlight, extra batteries, battery-operated radio, canned foods, peanut butter, non-electric can opener, extra clothes and shoes. Ask your daughter to help collect or buy the items that you need. Store the kit in an airtight container. Call your local Red Cross for other ideas and information.

**My six-year-old twin boys are upset after our recent disaster. What can I do to calm them?**

Ask them what would make them feel better. Children feel powerful when they can solve their own problems. Learning how to handle their fears now will help them all their lives. Here are some other ideas:

- Make 'Kids Treasure Bags' to help them when they feel upset or afraid. Have each child fill a cloth grocery bag with 'treasures' that remind him that he is safe and loved. These could be pictures of grandparents, a favorite rock or scout medals, an old stuffed animal, pictures he drew of a family vacation, or an old baby blanket. Use the bags for quiet time.
- Re-tell stories that you know comfort each child. Find books that show other children facing and solving their problems. These books tell children that they can also solve their problems. Talk to your librarian or bookstore clerk for book ideas.
- Use play to help them learn and practice ways to cope. Puppets, stuffed animals and play dough really help children work out their fears. You could also use the puppet or stuffed animal to help them act out what to do in an emergency. For example, have them make a teddy bear show what to do if there is a tornado.
- Let them call or visit loved ones. Friends and relatives can also help your child feel better.
- Give lots of TLC (tender loving care). Extra hugs and attention are important in times of crisis.
- Let them work off their worries physically. Swimming, running around the block, and biking are just a few ways to do this.

If your children's problems keep them from daily activities, think about getting professional help.

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