



Tips & Lessons — Disaster Response

Working with Children After a Disaster: Tips for Parents and Teachers

In the aftermath of a disaster or act of violence, many of us will encounter people directly affected by loss of homes, loss of community members, loss of jobs, or simply disruption of daily life. Even those not directly affected by the disaster or act of violence will face images of devastation in the media and wonder what they might do to help.

Children and young people are not immune to the effects of a disaster. While some children may lose their homes or experience a disruption of their lives, many other children will see or hear about the disaster or act of violence. Here are some tips for working with children after a disaster.

Listen

- If a child wants to talk about experiences or something he or she has seen on television, take time to listen to the story the child wants to tell or emotions or thoughts the child needs to express.

Turn Off the News

- Limit exposure to media reports of the disaster or act of violence.

Take Prayer Requests

- If you are working with children in Sunday School, youth group, or other church gatherings, ask children whom or what they would like to pray about. Some children may be need to share concerns. Take their prayer requests seriously.



Dear Lord, be with us this day as we gather together to comfort and support each other. Help us to find your guiding words and presence in those around us. Help us find listening ears and kind words as we seek to bring our thoughts and prayers to You.

In Christ's Name, Amen.

Fast Facts



Read - Updates On How to Help

<http://www.facebook.com/EpiscopalRelief>

Share - Articles From the Resource Library

<http://www.episcopalrelief.org/resourcelibrary>

Explore - US Disaster Program

www.episcopalrelief.org/usdisaster



- Listen attentively to each prayer request. You might repeat the request by saying, for example, “I pray that Will’s family is able to replace their roof soon.”
- If a child does NOT have a prayer request, do not in any way force the child to make a request. You may, however, respond by saying, for example, “we pray for Catherine and her family.” If the child later indicates that he or she would like to make a prayer request, please return to that child when appropriate.

Acknowledge Emotions

- Appreciate that anger at God and even doubt is normal in times like these. For now, focus on assuring the child that he or she is safe and that you will get through any crisis together. Don’t try to “fix” children’s emotions. Simply provide a safe place for children to express their emotions.
- Be honest. Do not sugar-coat a situation or tell a child “everything will be fine” unless you can realistically say this. Give your child age-appropriate information about what has happened without overdramatizing the situation.
- Practice patience. Children who have experienced disaster-related stress often regress in their development. Small children may even regress in their potty training. Outbursts or tantrums may occur. These are normal reactions. Be understanding and stay calm.
- Encourage teens and older children to check in with their friends. Social interaction with friends will help teens find comfort and stay connected with their peer group.

Expressive Outlets

- Encourage children to draw or write as a means of expressing themselves.

Help Kids Help

- Children often feel empowered and more confident if they can “do” something. Consider making cards of encouragement for those affected, by disaster or for first responders and relief workers. Youth groups or older children might organize a fundraiser for those in need.

Provide Quite Space

- Provide a quiet and calm place for children to play. Teach self-soothing techniques such as taking deep breaths and spending time in silence.

Questions for Sunday School conversations or art projects.



- What happened in our community?
- How did you feel after the _____ (name the disaster in your community)?
- Where might we find God in this situation?
- What could we do to help our families or our community?

Dear Lord, be with us today and always. Give us strength to face all challenges with love and with courage. Be with us as we heal in a hurting world.

In Christ’s name, Amen.

Additional Resources



Episcopal Relief & Development has developed three religious education modules for working with children from impacted areas the first week after a disaster. The free resources are:

[Ministering to Children After a Disaster \(Grades K-5\)](#)

[Ministering to Youth After a Disaster \(Grades 6-8\)](#)

[Ministering to Teens After a Disaster \(Grades 9-12\)](#)

Download them from the Episcopal Relief & Development web page at <http://www.episcopalrelief.org/resourcelibrary>.