



Tips and Lessons – Disaster Response

Ministering to Children After a Disaster

In the aftermath of Hurricane Harvey and Hurricane Irma's devastation, many of us will find ourselves ministering to those directly affected by hurricanes through loss of homes, loss of jobs or simply disruption of daily life. Even those not directly affected by the hurricane will face images of devastation in the media and wonder what they might do to help.

Children and young people are not immune from the effects of a disaster. While some children may lose their homes or experience other challenges, many other children will see or hear about the effects of the hurricane and the devastation of many communities in the United States.

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.

Take Prayer Requests

- If you are working with children in Sunday School, youth group or other church gatherings, ask children for their prayer requests. Take them seriously; some children may need to share concerns for family, friends, pets and places affected by the disaster.
- Listen attentively to each prayer. 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 one. 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 pray for a specific person or place, please follow up with that child when appropriate.

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.

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?



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" emotions. Simply provide a safe place for children to express their emotions.
- Be honest. Do not sugarcoat 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 compassionate.
- 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.

Turn Off the News

- Limit exposure to media reports about the disaster.

Provide Quiet 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.

For more information on helping flood victims, please see the following online resources:

["The Sunday After a Disaster"](#)

To learn more about Episcopal Relief & Development's response following Hurricane Harvey and Hurricane Irma and how you can help, visit our Hurricane Response pages:

www.episcopalrelief.org/harvey

www.episcopalrelief.org/irma

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.