



# Helping Children Cope With Catastrophe

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Children are not immune to crisis. They feel a wide range of emotions: frozen (numbness), anger, confusion, uncertainty and fear. They need information, support and direction in order to cope effectively with crisis. The following list of ideas may help you assist them.

**Give accurate and age appropriate information.** Children need clear explanations of facts, not opinions or fears. Limit exposure to the media if possible. Turn off the television. No one needs to see a disaster replayed multiple times.

**Be available. Talk with your children.** Do not overload children with too much information at any one time. Make sure you listen to the questions being asked and concerns being expressed. Do not project your own fears onto your children. Answer what has been asked. Do not volunteer more information that a child may not be ready to hear. LISTEN with your ears, your head and your heart.

**Help identify feelings and find safe ways to express them.**

Anger, aggression and even violence can be ways of expressing fears. Do not punish the expression of emotions, but help children find acceptable outlets for their feelings. There are no wrong emotions! Look for constructive outlets for anger rather than destructive ways.

**Maintain routines as much as possible.** Children find security in routines. Continue to expect good behavior, but temper your expectations with compassion and understanding. Children still need to be children, even in times of crisis. Find playtime as well as discussion time.

**Create ways to become involved.** We feel better when we can “do something” so help children find ways to “help”. They could make cards, collect canned goods, draw pictures or create a memorial. Action helps overcome feelings of being helpless and powerless.

**Be aware of behavioral, physical or emotional changes.** It is normal to see changes in these areas, but if the changes continue for long periods or become destructive or interrupt a child’s regular routine, don’t be afraid to seek professional guidance.

**Take care of yourself.** Crisis creates tremendous stress on the body. Help your children learn by practicing good self-care. Exercise, get plenty of rest and eat appropriately. A well-rested and nourished body can cope more effectively with the emotional stressors of crisis.

