

Disaster Distress Helpline

PHONE: 1-800-985-5990 TEXT: "TalkWithUs" to 66746
WEB: <http://disasterdistress.samhsa.gov>

How to Help Children Cope After Traumatic Events

When children experience a trauma, watch it on TV, or overhear others discussing it, they can feel scared, confused, or anxious. The good news is that children and youth are usually quite resilient. With the right support from the adults around them, they can thrive and recover. The most important ways to help are to make sure children feel connected, cared about, and loved. This tip sheet will help parents and caregivers respond in a helpful way.

- Parents and caregivers can help children express their emotions through conversation, writing, drawing, and singing. Most children want to talk about a trauma, so let them. Accept their feelings and tell them it is ok to feel sad, upset, or stressed. Crying is often a way to relieve stress and grief.
- Try to limit your child's exposure to media coverage. If they view news coverage on TV or the Internet, watch with them. Don't let talking about the trauma take over the family discussion for long periods of time.
- You can help children and youth see the good that can come out of a trauma. Heroic actions, families and friends who help, and support from people in the community are examples. Children may better cope with a trauma or disaster by helping others. They can write caring letters to those who have been hurt and they can send thank you notes to people who helped.
- Be careful not to blame a cultural, racial, or ethnic group, or persons with psychiatric disabilities for the violence that created the event. This may be a good opportunity to talk with children about discrimination and diversity. Let children know that they are not to blame when bad things happen.
- It's OK for children and youth to see you sad or crying, but try not to show intense emotions. Screaming and hitting or kicking furniture or walls can be scary for children. Violence can further frighten children or lead to more trauma.
- Show children and youth how to take care of themselves. Model self-care, set routines, eat healthy meals, get enough sleep, exercise, and take deep breaths to handle stress.

The SAMHSA-funded [Disaster Distress Helpline](http://disasterdistress.samhsa.gov) is the first national hotline dedicated to providing year-round crisis counseling after natural or man-made disasters. This toll-free, multilingual, crisis support service is available 24/7 via telephone (1-800-985-5990) and SMS (text 'TalkWithUs' to 66746) to residents in the U.S. and its territories.

[\(Adapted from SAMHSA Publications\)](#)