

# HELPING YOUR CHILD COPE AFTER A DISASTER

## UNDERSTANDING CHILDREN'S EMOTIONAL NEEDS

- Experiencing a disaster can leave children feeling scared, confused and insecure
- Children are most afraid that it will happen again, someone close to them will be killed or injured and they will be left alone or separated from their family
- Some children react right away, others may show signs of distress later on
- Strong emotions can influence a child's behavior
- The way a child copes with disaster is often tied to the way the caregiver copes
- Direct exposure to the disaster and grief related to a death and/or loss of property due to the disaster puts children at risk for longer psychological distress



## REACTIONS TO A DISASTER

### Elementary Aged Children (6-10 years):

### Middle Aged Children (11+ years):

- Generalized fear or specific fears related to the event
  - Regression or acting younger than their age
  - Anxiety about being separated from caregiver and/or being more clingy
  - Preoccupation with the traumatic event
  - Angry or aggressive for no clear reason
  - Sadness and guilt
  - Decline in academic performance
- Avoidance or withdrawal
  - Denial of feeling to caregiver
  - Physical aches or pains
  - Anxiety
  - Fear of leaving home
  - Decline in previously enjoyed activities
  - Engaging in risky behaviors
  - Argumentative at home and school
  - Decline in academic performance

## SUPPORTING RECOVERY

- Encourage your child to talk about their feelings-pay attention and be a good listener
- Comfort with soft words or a hug
- Give your child extra time and attention- just your presence can be reassuring
- Provide factual information about the disaster and allow them to ask questions- don't be afraid to admit you don't have all the answers
- Let them know that they are not to blame for what happened
- Involve your child in activities that help restore the family or community
- Limit media exposure
- Help your child return to a normal routine
- Be a model for your child by watching your own behavior

## RESOURCES FOR ADDITIONAL SUPPORT

FOR MORE INFORMATION  
PLEASE CONTACT THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR  
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