

TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT DISASTERS

DAUPHIN COUNTY MH/ID PROGRAM
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In today's news cycle, we see and hear about disasters, attacks and other terrible events regularly. Children hear these stories too! They may not fully understand what is happening but are perceptive and understand when stories are frightening or cause distress in their parents.

Many parents have questions on how to talk to children about events like the recent hurricanes, wildfires or attack in Las Vegas. Below is some information on dealing with disasters in a way that is helpful to your children.

Tips for Talking to My Child About Disasters:

1. **Let children work out their emotions.** Answer the questions children have about disasters honestly and allow them to express the full range of emotions related to it (including fear or sadness). Ask your children how they feel about the event and have them label their feelings. Be sure to ask what you can do to make them feel better.
2. **If your child asks you questions about the disaster, it's okay to answer them.** It's important to make your child feel heard and also to help increase their understanding of the event. For example, if your child is concerned about natural disasters, first explain to them that you will always have a plan and you will be there to care for them. **Again, what's most important is to make your child feel heard, nurtured and safe.**
3. **When your child tells you about their feelings, ask them what they would like to do about them.** Remember that no response is incorrect.
4. **One example of coping with feelings is finding some ways to take action so your child feels like they are helping the situation.**
 - **School age children** may want to help the community collect items to support relief workers, draw pictures or write poems and letters to the children who have lost homes or loved ones.
 - **Adolescents** can also help collect materials for the support of rescue workers or families who have lost home, give blood, write letters, organize a vigil or memorial service.
 - **Young adults** can reach out to international people in their community and organize discussion or action groups in addition to the above suggestions.

<http://preventchildabuse.org/resource/parenting-tip-talking-children-disasters/>