



College of Agriculture, Human and Natural Sciences

Disaster Education Response Team



How to Help Kids through a Disaster

Margaret Machara

Disasters are hard on people. While each is different, they all bring stress, hassle and the unknown. Families with young children have the unique challenge of dealing with the disaster while helping their children cope.

- **The Good And The Bad**

- You are your child's guide through disastrous situations. They will look to you both to see how to respond and to judge how bad the situation is. This means if you are panicking, they will panic. This makes things more stressful for you. However, this also means that if you can moderate your reaction, they will learn valuable coping skills.



- **Put On Your Game Face**

- You have to pull yourself together. It is ok to show true emotion; it is sad to lose your belongings in a flood, it is scary to have to evacuate due to a tornado, it is frustrating to have food spoil because the power is out. However, kids have to know that you are still in control and have a plan for moving forward. Acknowledge how you feel or what you don't know, and then take charge.



"I'm not sure when we'll be back in our home and I'm sad we have to leave, too; but we can stay at auntie's house until we know."

- **Be Proactive** - All disasters are different but there are ways that you can prepare ahead of time.

- Pack it up - Besides your regular emergency kit (flashlight, battery radio, medical kit), you can create a special pack for your kids. Include some snacks (healthy and nonperishable), non-electronic games (cards, dice, paper/pens, travel games), comfort item (maybe not their favorite, but it will help), clothing, hygiene items, medications, and a surprise treat. Make sure you check and update the items periodically as they expire or become outgrown.



Go to www.tnstate.edu/agriculture for additional information

Disaster Education Resources

Call (615) 963-1375 for more information.



- **Be Proactive cont.**

- Have a plan - Make sure kids know what to do in different disaster situations. Talk about where will you meet if you are separated and emergency people who can help. Decide on a code word in case you have to send someone unusual to meet your child. Choose a contact person who can help coordinate your family if you can't talk directly. It may be a good idea to choose someone who lives a little bit away so they won't be effected by the same disaster.



Be sure to practice your plan so you and your child/children will be able to react instantly without any questions. You should also post your emergency plan somewhere in your home where it can be easily seen and reviewed.

- At your fingertips - Have numbers (phone numbers, account numbers, social security numbers) somewhere other than your home as a backup. Make copies of important papers (birth certificate, license, shot records) and store them with a friend or family member just in case.
- Educate yourself - Make sure you know what to do in disasters (who to call, how to act, where to go). You can share the information with your child and be better prepared to help them through a disaster.



Wow, that article had some great ideas about how to plan for emergencies.

- **Through the Ages** - All kids are different, but here are some age appropriate things to keep in mind. Remember that children may regress (act younger) in stressful times. The tips listed below for younger children may also be applied to older ones.
 - Infants/toddlers - Routine is king! Get back to having things as close to normal as soon as possible. Where this is impossible, create a new "routine". Kids adjust better if they know what to expect. Give lots of affection. Kids need to feel loved and safe in hard times. This will probably help parents, too.
 - School age - Be understanding of kids' emotions. They are old enough to understand what is going on but will care about different things than adults do. Framing inconveniences as an adventure makes a great distraction. Give them tasks to help with so they won't feel helpless.
 - Teens - Older children can help out greatly. However, don't let them shoulder blame or too much responsibility during the disaster. Remember they are kids too.



TSU-12-0043(A)-15c-13515 - Tennessee State University is an AA/EEO employer and does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or age in its programs and activities. The following person has been designated to handle inquiries regarding the non-discrimination policies: Ms. Tiffany Baker-Cox, Director of Equity and Compliance, 3500 John A. Merritt Blvd. Nashville, TN 37209, (615) 963-7435.

