



City of Moreno Valley
Disaster Preparedness Series:

Helping Children Cope with Disaster

Disasters may strike quickly and without warning. These events can be frightening for adults, but they are traumatic for children if they do not know what to do.

During a disaster, your family may have to leave your home and daily routine. Children may become anxious, confused or frightened. As an adult, you will need to cope with disaster in a way that will help children avoid developing a permanent sense of loss. It is important to give children guidance that will help them reduce their fears.

We have used information from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the American Red Cross to help you and your children cope in a disaster. Ultimately, you should decide what is best for your children, but please consider using these suggestions as guidelines.

CHILDREN'S RESPONSE TO DISASTERS

Children depend on daily routines. They wake up, eat breakfast, go to school, and play with friends. When emergencies or disasters interrupt this routine, children may become anxious.

In a disaster, they will look to you and other adults for help. How you react to an emergency gives them clues on how to act. If you react with alarm, a child may become more scared. They see our fear as proof that the danger is real. If you seem overcome with a sense of loss, a child may feel their losses more strongly.

Children's fears also may stem from their imagination, and you should take these feelings seriously. A child who feels afraid is afraid. Your words and actions can provide reassurance. When talking with your child, be sure to present a realistic picture that is both honest and manageable.

Feelings of fear are healthy and natural for adults and children. As an adult, you need to keep control of the situation. When you are sure that danger has passed, concentrate on your child's emotional needs by asking the child what's uppermost in his or her mind. Having children participate in the family's recovery activities will help them feel that their life will return to "normal." Your response during this time may have a lasting impact.

After a disaster, children are most afraid that:

- The event will happen again.
- Someone will be injured or killed.
- They will be separated from the family.
- They will be left alone.