

Minnesota Department of Health Fact Sheet

Helping Children After the Flood

Children react differently to a flood and its aftermath depending on their age, developmental level, and prior experiences. Some will respond by withdrawing, while others will have angry outbursts. Still others will become agitated or irritable. Parents should attempt to remain sensitive to each child's reactions. The following are typical reactions children might exhibit during any natural disaster:

Children's Reactions

- Fear and worry about their safety or the safety of others, including pets
- Fear of separation from family members
- Clinging to parents, siblings, or teachers
- Worry that another flood will come
- Increase in activity level
- Decrease in concentration and attention
- Withdrawal from others
- Angry outbursts or tantrums
- Aggression to parents, siblings, or friends
- Increase in physical complaints, such as headaches and stomachaches
- Change in school performance
- Long-lasting focus on the flood, such as talking repeatedly about it or acting out the event in play

- Increased sensitivity to reminders of the flood
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Changes in appetite
- Lack of interest in usual activities, even playing with friends
- Regressive behaviors, such as baby-talk, bedwetting, or tantrums
- Increase in risky behaviors for teens, such as drinking alcohol, using substances, harming themselves, or engaging in dangerous activities

How to help Children

Spend time talking to children, letting them know that it is okay to ask questions and to share their worries. Answer questions briefly and honestly and be sure to ask children for their opinions and ideas. To help children's recovery:

- Be a role model. Try to remain calm, so your child can learn from you how to handle stressful situations.
- Monitor adult conversations. Be aware of what adults are saying about the flood or the resulting damage. Children may misinterpret what they hear and be unnecessarily frightened.
- Limit media exposure. Protect your child from graphic images of the flood, including those on



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- television, on the internet, and in the newspaper.
- Reassure children they are safe. You may need to repeat this frequently even after the flood passes. Spend extra time with them.
 - Replace lost or damaged toys as soon as you are able.
 - Calm worries about their friends' safety. Even though phones may not be working, reassure your children that their friends' parents are taking care of them, just the way they are being taken care of by you.
 - Tell children about community recovery. Reassure children that things are being done to restore electricity, phones, water, and gas. Tell them that the town or city will be removing debris and helping families find housing.
 - Take care of your children's health. Help them get enough rest, exercise, and healthy food. Be sure they have a balance of quiet times and physical activities.
 - Maintain regular daily life. Even in the midst of disruption and change, children feel more secure with a familiar routine.
- Maintain expectations. Stick to your family rules about good behavior and respect for others. Continue family chores, but keep in mind that children may need more reminding than usual.
 - Encourage children to help. Children cope better and recover sooner if they feel they are helping out. Give them small clean-up tasks or other ways to contribute.
 - Be extra patient once children have returned to school. They may be more distracted and need extra help with homework for a while.
 - Give support at bedtime. Children may be more anxious at times of separation from parents. Spend a little more time talking, cuddling, or reading than usual.
 - Keep things hopeful. Even in the most difficult situation, it is important to remain optimistic about the future. Your positive outlook will help your children be able to see good things in the world around them.
 - Seek professional help if your child still has difficulties more than six weeks after the flood.

Contact your local public health agency for more information. If you need the phone number, please call MDH at 651-201-5000

Adapted from Information provided by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN).



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