

# Parenting Guide



## How to Help Children Cope with a Natural Disaster

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# 6 Ways to Support Children in Coping with a Natural Disaster

## Talk about it.

It doesn't need to be continuously talked about, nor does it have to be a big conversation ("big" conversations can make it harder for kids to process their feelings and engage in a discussion). Make comments as it feels natural or comes up. Our kids benefit when we narrate their world and help them make sense of it, especially when it is out of the ordinary. Talking about it in this way also normalizes talking about hard things, traumatic things, and hard feelings. It gives our children the freedom to talk about it themselves, to talk about how they are feeling, and it helps to integrate it into the new "norm" of our world.

### Examples:

"I sure miss just being able to take a shower at home. So many things are different right now."

"Our neighborhood looks so different right now. I don't even always know where I am going because my landmarks are gone."

## Talk about your own experience and feelings and relate it to what's going on in the community.

One of the most powerful ways we can support our own children in navigating trauma and hard feelings is through modeling. How we act during this time sets the example and tone for them. So, be human! Show your feelings and talk about them to your kids. Let them know your heart hurts for those who have lost everything, for the destruction in the town we all love so much, for how things are forever changed. Talk about how your grateful that your family is okay and how that can grateful can even feel hard when so many others have lost so much. Let them know it's okay to feel and that we can handle big, hard feelings.

### Examples:

"I'm having some trouble sleeping at night because my brain won't stop thinking about what happened. You might notice I seem a little off from normal."

"Sometimes I just need to cry right now. I am so sad that so much has changed because of the hurricane."

## Be a mirror to reflect to your children how they are doing- or at least what you are observing.

Developing an awareness of our own feelings and how they impact our behavior is something that our children always need help with, but it is particularly important during times of heightened stress or trauma. Because we can become even more disconnected from our experiences and thoughts during traumatic times (think “foggy brain”) our children can greatly benefit from us narrating their experience for them. We can help them develop the inner awareness and voice to navigate their life in a regulated manner.

### Examples:

“It makes sense you’re feeling cranky right now- everything we know is different, nothing feels normal.”

“I bet you might really miss being able to go to Carrier Park, we can’t do anything we used to right now.”



## Focus on the good and the helpers whenever you can.

There are beautiful things happening even in the most tragic of times. Helping our children to see the lotus growing in the mud is helping them to begin to be able cognitively cope with the harshness of life.

Examples:

“Look at all the people out helping to make sure everyone can get water and food. We really do come together when it matters most.”

“This is why I love Asheville so much- we have such a community of people who will always help take care of each other.”

Give your children ways to help so that they can have a sense of control over something when everything feels out of control.

Ask your children if they want to help with the house, your neighborhood, the larger community. It can be small tasks or large tasks- the important part is let them have a sense of repairing, of making things better, of feeling connected to something. Give them options of how they could help and don't force one specific way.

Examples:

"Would you want to color pictures that we could hand out to our neighbors to help make them smile?"

"There are so many ways for us to help right now. I wonder how you would want to do it?"

Make sure to add silly whenever you can and stay connected.

This can be hard to do during difficult times, especially during natural disasters where we are often just attempting to meet our basic needs. Even small acts of silly (a silly face or a cheesy joke) can go a long way to adding some positive feelings into a time where they will be hard to come by. Silly naturally connects us as well, which is also an important part of helping our children cope. We need them to know,

“I cannot make life not hard but, as long as I am here, you will never have to do the hard alone.”