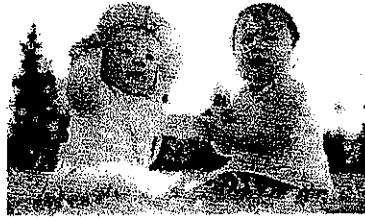


Helping Children Cope with Their Fears



Before the Emergency

- Talk about your own experiences and/or read aloud about emergencies. Local libraries have some good books. Be sensitive to your children's needs as you do this. The point is not to frighten but to increase their awareness of some of the things that may happen.
- Walk through your house with them and have them practice quickly getting in each room's safe place. Hold frequent earthquake and fire drills to reinforce this practice.
- Walk with your children around their favourite outside places to play. Identify the safe places to be in these locations.
- Ask your children's school about their emergency response plan. The school's plans may include holding the child until parents arrive. Make sure to explain this to your children and the reason why.
- Provide your children with the name of a relative or friend who will care for them if you should get stuck at work, etc. Preferably this will be a person that the children know and are comfortable with.

After the Emergency

- Give lots of hugs to your children and tell them everything will be okay. This provides physical and verbal reassurance to them.
- Encourage your children to express their feelings, especially through play and physical activities. Listen to them carefully when they share these things with you.
- Be careful not to ignore the emotional needs of your children once you have determined that everyone is physically okay. Fear is a normal reaction to any dangerous situation.
- Include children in clean up activities. It is comforting to the child to watch the household begin to resume its normal functions. It also gives them a job to do.
- Children may revert to immature behaviour for a few days. Do not focus on this behaviour, rather praise them for their help in cleaning up, etc.
- Maintain routines but reduce performance expectations. If fears, sleep, or unusual behaviours get worse for more than two weeks, take the time to seek professional help.



Emotional Responses in Emergencies



Typical First Reactions:

- Disbelief and shock
- Fear
- Problems with concentration or memory
- Need for help and information
- Disorientation & numbness
- Reluctance to abandon property
- Difficulty in making decisions
- Helpfulness to others

Some Later Responses:

- Frustration and anxiety
- Moodiness and irritability
- Unexplained crying
- Change in appetite
- Difficulty sleeping or sleeping too much
- Feelings of powerlessness
- Guilt for survival or not preventing disaster
- Anger and suspicion
- Apathy and depression
- Fatigue, low energy
- Digestive problems
- Headaches, body pain
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Isolation from family and friends

Special Effects on Children:

- Return to earlier behaviour such as thumb-sucking or bed wetting
- Reluctance to go to bed
- Fantasies that the disaster never happened
- Inability to concentrate
- Clinging to parents, crying or screaming
- Nightmares
- Refusal to attend school
- Withdrawal, immobility

Special Effects on Pets:

- Unusually nervous or fearful
- Excessive protectiveness
- Sensitive to noise or storms
- Increased aggression

Healing Emotionally

- Discuss what happened
- Recognize the losses you have suffered
- Give yourself and your family permission to grieve and time to heal
- You may want to limit exposure to media covering the event