

What Parents Can Do to Help Children Cope after a Hurricane

As parents, you are your children's biggest influence. The more we are able to manage our own feelings, the better we can help our children cope. The most important thing a parent can do in an emergency situation is to remain calm. Children have the amazing ability to pick up on their parent's emotions more than we think they do. In a hurricane recovery situation, children will look up to their parents for security, as well as for signs on how to act. As we recover from Hurricane Irma, it is helpful to be honest with our kids and explain what is going on. However, it is wise to use caution, and base the level of detail on what is appropriate for their ages and emotional well-being. Below are some suggested ways parents can help reduce fears and anxiety after a disaster.

- Assess what level of information your child needs. Some children are comforted by the details, while for others this could create more fear and anxiety.
- Calmly explain the situation. In an age appropriate manner, tell the children what you know, as well as what will happen next. Let them know your current plans for insuring their safety.
- Use language that your children will understand. For young children, reassure them that they are safe and keep your explanations simple and appropriate. For older children, be present to answer their questions and offer a safe place to express how they are feeling.
- Encourage your children to talk to you about their experience, and how they are feeling. Help them open up to you by asking open-ended questions, and encouraging the use of feeling words such as happy, scared, sad, and mad. If they are struggling expressing themselves, encourage them to draw a picture or tell a story.
- Listen, Listen, Listen! Have family discussions, and reassure them that your job is to take care of them. Comfort them by telling them what they are feeling is normal.
- Include children in appropriate recovery activities. A simple responsibility will help children feel they are a part of the recovery, as well as in control and helpful.
- Go back to a normal routine as quickly as possible. When emergencies disrupt their daily schedule, children can become anxious. Returning to their everyday routine will comfort them, and offer a healthy distraction.
- Restrict the amount of TV, radio, and internet that your children are exposed to. News coverage of disasters and images can be traumatic to children of all ages. A lot of fears stem from children's imagination. Monitoring what they are watching will help limit any negative thoughts or nightmares.
- Be aware of the conversations that are held in front of your children.
- Spend extra time with your children at bedtime and pray together. Thank God for His protection for your family, and reassure them that He is with them every day, especially in times like this.

- If your child's stress, anxiety, and/or fears continue to worsen over time, and if any of this hinders their daily behavior, it may be appropriate to talk to a professional. Our school can offer a list of resources that may be appropriate for your child's needs.