

Listen, Protect, and Connect

**PSYCHOLOGICAL
FIRST AID FOR
CHILDREN AND PARENTS**



**Helping you and your child
in times of disaster.**

For more information, please visit www.ready.gov

As a parent, you are in the best position to help your child in the event of a disaster.



Just as you talk to your child's doctor about his or her health, such as what to do when your child is sick or hurt, you can also talk to your child's doctor, mental health professional, or someone at your child's school who can help you and your child after a disaster.

You can help your child if you

Listen, Protect, and Connect

the **three steps of “psychological first aid”** for your child after a disaster.

These steps can help your child bounce back from a disaster.

Getting Started: Understanding the Effect of a Disaster on Your Child

THINK ABOUT your child's
“DIRECT EXPERIENCE” with the
disaster.

“Direct experience” means a **FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE** of the disaster (physically experiencing or directly seeing the event as it happens).

After a disaster, changes can happen in a child's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Children may worry about family members, friends, or pets that they care about and worry if the disaster will happen again.

Common reactions to disasters include trouble sleeping, problems at school and with friends, trouble listening, and not finishing work or chores. Your child may become more irritable, sad, angry, or worried as they think about what has happened, and as they experience the recovery efforts after the disaster.

**THINK ABOUT and IDENTIFY
“CONTRIBUTING FACTORS” that
can increase your child’s reaction to
the disaster.**

“Contributing factors” include (check all that apply to your child):

- loss of a family member or friend
- seeing serious injury or the death of another person
- family members who are missing after the disaster
- getting hurt or becoming sick due to the disaster
- being unable to evacuate quickly
- home loss, family moves, changes in schools or neighborhoods, and/or loss of belongings
- past traumatic experiences
- pet loss

If your child has had any of these experiences, you may wish to consider talking to his or her doctor, a child mental health professional, or someone at your child’s school to get help.

Now that you know about things that can affect your child after a disaster, you’re ready to **LISTEN, PROTECT,** and **CONNECT!**

1. Listen, Protect, and Connect

The first important step to help your child after a disaster is to **listen and pay attention** to what your child says and how he or she acts. Remember that your child may also show his or her feelings in nonverbal ways.

Let your child know you are willing to listen and talk about the disaster. You can use the following questions to talk with your child. Afterward, **write down how he or she answers:**



1. What does your child think happened and is now happening?

2. What does your child understand about the help disaster responders give to people during and after an event?

3. What is your child most upset about?

4. What is your child most confused about?

5. Other items to note:

Listen, observe, and take notes about **changes in behavior** you see:

* Changes in behavior and/or mood:

* Changes at school:

* Changes in sleep and/or eating:

* Changes with family and/or friends:

* Other changes you note:

Listen, 2. Protect, and Connect

You can **help make your child feel better** by doing some or all of the following:



- * Answer questions simply and honestly (you may need to do this many times).
- * Try to clear up any confusion your child has. Let your child know that he or she is not to blame for the disaster.
- * Provide opportunities for your child to talk, draw, and play, but **don't force it**.
- * Learn what is in place and what is coming up in your neighborhood in response to the disaster.
- * With your child's help, develop a family safety plan and practice it (http://www.ready.gov/kids/_downloads/familyplan.pdf).
- * Talk to your child about what is going on to make him or her safe at home, at school, and in your neighborhood.

- * Limit access to television and newspapers that show disturbing scenes of the disaster. **Remember that what’s not upsetting to you and other adults may upset and confuse your child.**
- * Talk about common reactions that adults and children may have during and after a disaster.
- * Maintain “normal” daily tasks and activities as much as possible; limit unnecessary changes.
- * Encourage your child to express his or her thoughts and feelings about what has happened. Let your child know you are interested in what he or she thinks and feels, and listen attentively when your child talks to you.
- * Take a break once in a while from talk and activities related to the disaster.
- * Find ways for your child to feel helpful to your family and others (helping around the house, neighborhood, or school).

List other **things you do** that make your child feel better:

Listen, Protect, and 3. Connect



Reaching out to family, friends, and people in your neighborhood will help your child after a disaster. These connections will build strength for both you and your child. Consider ways to make some or all of the following connections:

- * Find people who can offer support to your child and your family.
- * Keep communication open with others involved in your child's life (doctors, teachers, coaches, etc.).
- * Check out school and community resources for disaster survivors.
- * Spend extra time with your child and family.

- * Encourage after-school activities for your child.
- * Have a family meeting and discuss how everyone can stay in touch if separated during or after a disaster. Create a Family Communications Plan (http://www.ready.gov/kids/_downloads/familyplan.pdf).
- * Set small goals with your child. Praise him or her for even small achievements.
- * Build on your child's strengths. Find ways to help your child use what he or she has learned in the past to help your child deal with the disaster.
- * Remind your child that a disaster is rare, and discuss other times when he or she has felt safe.
- * Learn and seek out other information that may be helpful to you, your child, and family.

List other **things you do** that connect you, your child, and family with the community:

Keep in Mind

As you help your child after a disaster, your **“listen, protect, and connect”** efforts may be more successful — and you may be less stressed — if you keep in mind:

- * It is good to be aware of your thoughts, feelings, and reactions about the event, which can be seen and can affect your child.
- * How you cope and behave after an event will influence how your child copes and behaves.
- * Show your child the importance of keeping up good physical and mental health even during stressful times.
- * Each family member may have a different way or time period needed to cope with disaster.
- * Children of different ages understand and react differently to disasters.
- * A child’s behavior may get worse before it gets better.
- * Your child may be more demanding of your time and attention.

- * Extra patience with your child is needed.
- * For many children, any different behavior due to a disaster improves over time.
- * Your child will look to you as a role model for handling the disaster and what happens next.

It is okay to seek professional help:

- ✓ If you checked off any boxes on page 5.
- ✓ When your child's behavior is not getting better over time.
- ✓ When you or other family members have feelings of being overwhelmed or overly stressed that don't go away over time.
- ✓ When you are not sure about how to handle a situation with your child.
- ✓ When you feel unsure, not able, or unfamiliar with how to guide your child.

**Remember that you
and your child can
EXPECT RECOVERY.**

For More Information

Please visit www.ready.gov

Ready is a national public service advertising campaign produced by The Advertising Council in partnership with U.S. Department of Homeland Security. The *Ready* Campaign is designed to educate and empower Americans to prepare for and respond to emergencies, including natural disasters and potential terrorist attacks.

**For more information on
Listen, Protect, and Connect:
Psychological First Aid
for Children and Parents,**
contact Dr. Merritt Schreiber
at m.schreiber@ucla.edu.

Acknowledgements



Thanks to the support of the following centers at the University of California Los Angeles, School of Public Health:
Center for Public Health and Disasters and Health and Media Research Group.



**Listen, Protect, and Connect:
Psychological First Aid for Children and Parents**
© 2006 M. Schreiber and R. Gurwitch.
All rights reserved.

copy editor/designer: Rachel C. Flores