

Disaster Reactions and Intervention Suggestions

adapted from www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/publications/allpubs/ADM90-538/tmsection3.asp

Each age group is vulnerable in unique ways to the stresses of disaster. Different issues and concerns become relevant during the progression of phases in the post-disaster period. Some disaster stress reactions listed below may be experienced immediately, while others may appear months later. The following table describes possible disaster reactions of the different age groups and helpful responses to them.

Ages	1 - 5	6 - 11	12 - 18
BEHAVIORAL SYMPTOMS			
	Fears of the dark Avoidance of sleeping alone Resumption of bed-wetting, thumb sucking and/or clinging to parents. Increased crying	Decline in school performances. Aggressive behavior at home or school. Hyperactive or silly behavior. Whining, clinging and/or acting like a younger child. Increased competition with younger siblings for parents' attention.	Decline in academic performance. Rebellion at home or school. Decline in previous responsible behavior. Agitation or decrease in energy level, apathy Delinquent behavior Social withdrawal
PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS			
	Loss of appetite Stomach aches Nausea Sleep Problems, nightmares Speech difficulties Tics	Change in appetite Headaches Stomach aches Sleep disturbances, nightmares	Appetite changes Headaches Gastrointestinal problems Skin eruptions Complaints of vague aches and pains Sleep disorders
EMOTIONAL SYMPTOMS			
	Anxiety & Fear Sadness Irritability & Angry outbursts Withdrawal	School avoidance Withdrawal from friends, familiar activities Angry Outbursts Obsessive preoccupation with disaster safety.	Loss of interest in peer social activities, hobbies, recreation. Sadness or depression Resistance to authority Feelings of inadequacy and helplessness.
INTERVENTION OPTIONS			
	Give verbal assurance and physical comfort Provide comforting bedtime routines Avoid unnecessary separations Permit the child to sleep in parents' room temporarily Encourage expression regarding losses (i.e., deaths, pets, toys) Monitor media exposure to disaster trauma Encourage expression through play activities.	Give additional attention and consideration. Relax expectations of performance at home and at school temporarily. Set gentle but firm limits for acting out behavior. Provide structured but undemanding home chores and rehabilitation activities. Encourage verbal and play expression of thoughts and feelings. Listen to the child's repeated retelling of a disaster event. Involve the child in preparation of family emergency kit, home drills. Rehearse safety measures for future disasters. Coordinate school disaster program for peer support, expressive activities, education on disasters, preparedness planning, identifying at-risk children.	Give additional attention and consideration. Relax expectations of performance at home and school temporarily. Encourage discussion of disaster experiences with peers, significant adults. Avoid insistence on discussion of feelings with parents. Encourage physical activities. Rehearse family safety measures for future disasters. Encourage resumption of social activities, athletics, clubs etc. Encourage participation in community rehabilitation and reclamation work. Coordinate school programs for peer support and debriefing, preparedness planning, volunteer community recovery, identifying at-risk teens.