



## **Helping Children Cope with the Effects of Hurricanes: Tips for Parents and Other Caregivers**

Following a tragedy like Hurricane Katrina or Rita, children often feel confused and upset. In the aftermath of such events, children typically look towards adults for information and guidance on how to react. It is extremely important for parents and caregivers to help children reestablish a sense of safety and security. Other guidelines for dealing with children in the days and weeks following a traumatic event include:

- Avoid appearing anxious or overwhelmed. Staying calm will help children feel calm.
- Reassure children that they are safe and that adults and other professionals are working very hard to protect them.
- Talk to them about the event in language that is age appropriate.
- Express the emotions that you are feeling.
- Encourage children to talk about what they are feeling and what they have heard.
- Be honest in your answers to questions and use language children can understand.
- Maintain as much routine as possible; keeping things familiar keeps things comfortable.
- Help children find ways to relax and calm themselves. For children, playing can naturally reduce stress, exercise, listening to music, or taking a warm bath helps to relax. Other techniques can include deep breathing or focusing on pleasant thoughts or images.
- Limit children's viewing of television coverage about the event.
- Don't be surprised if a child's mood fluctuates or if they become clingier. Respond by letting youngsters know that you are there for them physically and emotionally.
- Take care of yourself. You will be better able to support your children if you are monitoring your own stress levels and getting the support that you need. Make sure that you get plenty of rest, nutrition, and exercise.

Caregivers of children who experienced Hurricane Rita first hand should be on the alert for the following behaviors and should contact mental health personnel if the following behaviors present themselves. These behaviors include:

- Long term denial and/or avoidance of the traumatic event; lack of recognized response to the trauma
- Extended periods of depression (loss of interest in activities, feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, inability to experience moments of joy, profound emptiness)
- Vague and generalized feelings of guilt and depression
- Persisting anxiety about the traumatic event
- Inability to respond to comfort and rejection of support
- Purposeful withdrawal from friends, loss of sociability
- Sleep or appetite problems, unusual loss or gain of weight
- Prolonged rather than transient physical complaints
- Acting younger for a prolonged period
- Destructive outbursts
- Inappropriate euphoria
- Accident-proneness
- Inappropriate/illegal behavior
- Decline in school performance, refusal to attend school
- Excessive grief

**For more information or to schedule an appointment, please call 337-436-9533 or  
1-888-414-FYCA.**

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