

## Children & Media During Disaster Recovery

The impact of media coverage will be different depending upon whether you are:

1. currently evacuated viewing for the first time your home or neighborhood destroyed,
2. affected by flooding in the past,
3. viewing images from home of a flood nearby, and/or
4. viewing news about the impact that flooding has on others (loss of their home, belongings, pets, school or church buildings), but not directly affected yourself.

Media coverage can produce increased fears and anxiety in children.

- Very young children (< 5 years) may not understand that the coverage and repetition of images from an earlier or past event is a replay. They may think the event is continuing to happen or is happening again.
- The more time children spend watching coverage, the more likely they are to have negative reactions.
- Images and videos of loss may be upsetting or confusing to children.
- Excessive exposure to media coverage (>30 mins. per day) may impact children's recovery.

## What Parents Can Do to Help

- Limit Your Children's Exposure to Media Coverage
  - ✓ Do not assume children are not paying attention or don't understand. If it's playing, assume children are listening / watching and understand at least parts of what is being reported.
  - ✓ The younger the child, the less exposure s/he should have.
  - ✓ You may choose to eliminate all exposure for very young children.
  - ✓ If it's an option, play DVDs or videotapes of favorite shows or movies.
  - ✓ [Turn off "auto-play" on your social media feeds.](#)
  - ✓ Consider family activities away from television, radio, or internet.
- Watch and Discuss with Children
  - ✓ Watch what they watch.
  - ✓ Discuss the news stories with them, asking about their thoughts and feelings about what they saw, read, or heard.
  - ✓ Ask older children and teens about what they have seen on the internet, in order to get a better sense of their thoughts, fears, concerns, and point-of-view.
- Seize Opportunities for Communication
  - ✓ Use viewing images as conversation opportunities. Be available to talk about their feelings, thoughts, and concerns, and reassure them of their safety and of plans to keep them safe.

- Clear Up Any Misunderstandings
  - ✓ Don't presume you know what your children are thinking; ask if they are worried and discuss those worries with them, reassuring them as needed.
  - ✓ Ask questions to find out if your children are understanding the situation accurately; they may think they are at risk when they are not.
- Let Your Children Know about Successful Community Efforts
  - ✓ You may want to share positive media images, like stories of people or animals brought to safety.
  - ✓ Reassure your children that the community helpers are at work. This will give them a sense that adults are actively taking steps to protect them, their home, their pets, and their neighborhood.
- Educate Yourself
  - ✓ Learn about children's common reactions to natural disasters.
  - ✓ Know that many children are resilient and cope well, but some may have continuing difficulties. These reactions vary with age and exposure to the event.

### “Help Kids Cope” App



Helps parents talk to their kids about the disasters they may face and know how best to support them throughout—whether sheltering-in-place at home, evacuating to a designated shelter, or helping your family heal after reuniting. This mobile app is also a great resource for teachers and other professionals involved in children's lives. This is the iOS version of the app.

### SAMHSA Behavioral Health Disaster Response App



Makes it easy to provide quality support to survivors. Users can navigate pre-deployment preparation, on-the-ground assistance, post-deployment resources, and more—at the touch of a button from the home screen. Users also can share resources, like tips for helping survivors cope, find local behavioral health services, as well as self-care support for responders for all stages of deployment.

Information adapted from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, [www.NCTSN.org](http://www.NCTSN.org).

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