

***Helping Children Cope with Disasters:
A Manual for Professionals Working with
Elementary School Children***

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ABBREVIATED VERSION FOR GENERAL DISASTERS

This abbreviated version of the original manual is intended for use in other types of disasters. The reader is encouraged to adapt the materials herein to the specifics of the situation at hand. Many of the activities are designed for use in the weeks or months following a disaster (e.g., exercises for holiday times) and are intended to enhance children’s coping during the long-term aftermath of disasters.

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INTRODUCTION: THE RESEARCH PROJECT AND THE MANUAL

Hurricane Andrew struck Dade County, Florida on August 24th, 1992, in one of the worst natural disasters to occur in the United States. Destruction was more widespread than expected, and many children were terrified during the hurricane as their homes were damaged or torn apart. In the aftermath, children had to adapt to the loss of their homes, pets, toys, clothing, and friends.

Project Goals:

Previous research has demonstrated that severe natural disasters can result in increased signs of stress, fear, anxiety, and hopelessness in children. However, more information is needed about which children are most at risk for experiencing severe disaster related stress (Vogel & Vernberg, 1993). The current research project was designed to address these concerns through three goals. First, to document the functioning of elementary school children at several timepoints up to one year following the disaster. Second, to evaluate the effectiveness of a structured school based intervention program in alleviating stress and promoting positive coping among children affected by the disaster. Third, to identify the factors that predict which children are most likely to be affected by disasters, in order to focus the efforts of future interventions.

The classroom interventions and the questionnaires:

The project focused on approximately 568 third, fourth, and fifth graders from three elementary schools in South Dade County. The children were evenly divided by sex and grade, and represented each of the major ethnic groups in Dade County (White, Hispanic, and Black). Damage to homes and businesses in the local areas surrounding the schools varied from minor to total destruction. The structured classroom activities were conducted in two of the three schools from November through June, with the other school serving as a comparison.

The children were assessed at three timepoints following the Hurricane: 3 months, 7 months, and 10 months. At each timepoint, they were given questionnaires to measure concepts such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, anxiety, fears, social support, coping, and exposure to hurricane related traumatic events. The information in this manual is based in part on the analysis of this information, and in part on the resources listed in the Bibliography.

Using the manual:

The manual is designed for use by teachers, counselors, and psychologists working with elementary school children. It contains information and activities to use after a disaster as well as to prepare children on a yearly basis for the possibility of a disaster. The activities in the manual are based on those that were used in the elementary schools as part of the research project. They have been adapted for use with disasters in general, rather than specifically for hurricanes.

CHILDREN'S REACTIONS TO DISASTERS

The importance of asking children how they feel:

In our research project following Hurricane Andrew, the children were asked to complete questionnaires about their thoughts and feelings. When the questionnaires revealed that a particular child was having difficulty, his/her parent and/or school counselor was notified. Parents and school counselors sometimes were surprised to learn the extent to which their children were still distressed. Some children mentioned that they did not want to burden their parents by telling them about their feelings. This highlights the importance of asking children themselves to report their thoughts and feelings.

How to measure children's thoughts and feelings:

One of the questionnaires used in our research project is called the Reaction Index, and was based on the Post-traumatic Stress Disorder Reaction Index for Children developed by Frederick, Pynoos, and Nader (1992). This is a widely recommended instrument used to measure children's symptoms of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), following a disaster. The questionnaire and scoring guidelines are included in this section beginning on page 11, in order to facilitate their use with children. After scoring, the questionnaire categorizes children into one of the following levels of PTSD: Doubtful, Mild, Moderate, Severe, or Very Severe.

Many children may experience some of the symptoms of PTSD following a disaster. The main symptoms of PTSD are as follows:

- Reexperiencing of the disaster during play, dreams, or flashbacks. For example, a child may:
 - Repeatedly act out what happened in the disaster when playing with toys
 - Have many distressing dreams about the disaster
 - Be distressed when exposed to events that resemble the disaster or at the anniversary of the disaster
 - Act or feel as if the disaster is happening again
- Avoidance of reminders of the disaster or general numbness to all emotional topics. For example, a child may:
 - Avoid all activities that remind him/her of the disaster
 - Be unable to remember parts of the disaster
 - Withdraw from other people
 - Have difficulty feeling positive emotions

- Increased “arousal” symptoms. For example, a child may
 - Have difficulty falling or staying asleep
 - Be irritable
 - Have difficulty concentrating
 - Startle more easily

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder Over Time:

Results from our research project showed that at 3 months after the Hurricane, 56% of the children were experiencing moderate symptoms of PTSD. At 7 months after the Hurricane, 41% of the children were experiencing symptoms. At 10 months after the Hurricane, 34% of the children were still experiencing moderate symptoms. Thus, there is a sizeable proportion of students who continue to exhibit symptoms for up to a year or more following a disaster. For assistance in identifying which students this may be, see the section in this manual about “identifying children at risk” (page 15).

Among the children who were still experiencing symptoms 10 months after the Hurricane, the most commonly reported problems included:

- feeling more nervous
- having more stomachaches
- feeling more alone
- having thoughts and feelings that interfered with their concentration at school
- feeling like another Hurricane may happen
- avoiding reminders of the Hurricane.

Behavioral and Emotional Reactions of Elementary School Children:

In addition to the internal feelings and thoughts listed above, elementary school children may experience a wide variety of other behavioral and emotional symptoms following a disaster. Below are listed some of these symptoms with specific examples:

Fears

- Fear that they will be left alone or separated from their family
- Fear that something will happen to one of their family members
- Fear of the dark
- Fear of being alone
- Fear that they caused some part of the disaster

Regressive Behavior

- Acting like a younger child
- Irritability
- Whining
- Clinging behavior

Behavioral Difficulties

- Aggressive behavior at home or school
- Angry outbursts
- Hyperactive or silly behavior
- Difficulty sharing with others

Depressive Symptoms

- Crying
- Withdrawal from others
- Changes in appetite
- Insomnia or not wanting to sleep alone
- Nightmares
- Sadness
- Loss of interest in previously preferred activities

School difficulties

- Poor concentration in school
- Decline in academic performance
- Refusal to attend school

How common are these reactions?

All of the above are common reactions children report after a major disaster. Many children exhibit some subset of these reactions for a short period of time. In most cases, these symptoms will improve over time. However, in some cases, the symptoms may not resolve, and there may be reason to be more concerned. Please see the next section in the manual for information on how to identify those children who may be at risk for long term difficulties (page 15).

REACTION INDEX

This questionnaire is based on the Post-traumatic Stress Disorder Reaction Index for Children by Frederick, Pynoos, and Nader (1992), and is reprinted with permission from Dr. Calvin Frederick.

Name: _____

Instructions: The questions below ask about your thoughts and feelings about the disaster. Answer each question by placing a check mark under the word which describes your thoughts and feelings about the disaster **during the past few weeks**. Please be sure to answer all questions.

	NONE of the time	SOME of the time	MOST of the time
1. Do you get scared, afraid or upset when you think about the disaster?	_____	_____	_____
2. Do you go over in your mind what happened - that is, do you see pictures in your mind or hear sounds in your mind about the disaster?	_____	_____	_____
3. Do thoughts about the disaster come back to you even when you don't want them to?	_____	_____	_____
4. Do you have good or bad dreams about the disaster or other bad dreams?	_____	_____	_____
5. Do things sometimes make you think it might happen again?	_____	_____	_____
6. Do you feel as good about things you liked to do before the disaster like playing with friends, sports, school activities?	_____	_____	_____
7. Do you feel more alone inside, or more alone with your feelings - like other people really don't understand how you feel about what you went through?	_____	_____	_____
8. Do you feel so scared, upset, or sad that you don't really want to know how you feel?	_____	_____	_____
9. Have you felt so scared, upset, or sad that you couldn't even talk or cry?	_____	_____	_____

Reaction Index, page 2

Name: _____	NONE of the time	SOME of the time	MOST of the time
10. Do you startle more easily or feel more jumpy or nervous than before the disaster?	_____	_____	_____
11. Do you sleep well?	_____	_____	_____
12a. Do you feel bad or guilty because you didn't do something you wish you had done?	_____	_____	_____
12b. Do you feel bad or guilty because you did something you wish you had not done?	_____	_____	_____
13. Do thoughts or feelings about what happened get in the way of remembering things, like what you learned at school or at home?	_____	_____	_____
14. Is it as easy to pay attention (concentrate) as before the disaster?	_____	_____	_____
15. Do you want to stay away from things that make you remember what happened to you during the disaster?	_____	_____	_____
16. When something reminds you, or makes you think about the disaster, do you get tense or upset?	_____	_____	_____
17. Since the disaster are you doing things again that you had once stopped doing? (such as sleeping with someone, biting your nails or sucking your thumb)	_____	_____	_____
18. Do you have more stomach aches, headaches, or other sick feelings since the disaster than you did before?	_____	_____	_____
19. Do you do things now that you wouldn't have done before? (such as getting into fights, disobeying more, doing dangerous things when you play)	_____	_____	_____
20. How much would the things that happened to you during the disaster upset or bother most children your age?	NONE	SOME	A LOT

ADD INTERFERENCE QUESTION

Scoring the Reaction Index

Begin scoring the Reaction Index by assigning a numerical value to each response as follows:

None of the time = 0

Some of the time = 2

Most of the time = 4

Exceptions:

1. Questions 6, 11, and 14 are reverse coded. For these questions, “None of the time” = 4, “Some of the time” = 2, and “Most of the time” = 0.
2. Questions 12a and 12b are consolidated into one score by taking the highest response of the two (e.g., if 12a = “None of the time”, and 12b = “Most of the time”, then a 4 should be assigned and counted once).

Next, take the sum of the 20 items you have coded.

The following ranges are Symptom Level Classifications based on these summed scores:

Symptom Level	Summed Score Range
Doubtful	0 - 11
Mild	12 - 24
Moderate	25 - 39
Severe	40 - 59
Very Severe	60 or higher

IDENTIFYING CHILDREN AT RISK FOR LONG TERM PROBLEMS

Issues to consider when identifying children at risk:

The following information is presented here to guide educators in identifying early in the process those children who may have ongoing emotional difficulties following a disaster. Since children's emotional well-being is not always apparent from their behavior, it is important to spend time with them discussing their experiences and feelings. During these interactions, it may be possible to obtain information regarding the areas listed below, and thus identify children who may require closer monitoring. The information below has been tailored toward the elementary school child.

When determining if a child is having a "serious" problem, it is important to consider how the child acted before the disaster. For example, if the child was usually shy or withdrawn, then this type of behavior after the disaster would not be as unusual. Children who react in ways that are very different from their usual manner, or who are much more extreme and persistent in their usual behavior should be monitored closely. In addition, it is important to be familiar with children's typical reactions following a disaster (see page 7 in this manual) in order to judge whether or not a reaction is problematic.

Using predictors to identify children at risk:

Our research findings indicate that there are predictors that can be used to guide professionals in identifying which children may be most at risk for difficulties many months and even a year following the disaster. These predictors of long term difficulties are listed below in the following categories: Disaster Related Experiences, Psychological Issues, and Behavioral Issues. Since each child's situation is unique, it is not possible to generate exact rules dictating how many symptoms predict long term difficulties. However, based on the guidelines provided, if you are concerned about a child, the best response is to notify the school counselor or psychologist. With their assistance, a plan can be developed to address the situation in school, to notify a parent, and/or to refer to an outside professional.

I. Disaster Related Experiences:

Children who have experienced any of the following are more likely to have long term difficulties:

- Threats to their physical safety during the disaster
- Lost their belongings or house during the disaster
- Family had to relocate as a result of the disaster
- Children who report that they were very upset during and after the disaster
- Children who thought they might die during the disaster
- Children who attended schools following the disaster that had multiple schedule changes, double sessions, or a lot of disruption

II. Psychological Issues:

A. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

One of the best ways to assess psychological distress following a disaster, is to measure a child's level of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder with a questionnaire such as the Reaction Index (see page 7 for more detailed description of the Reaction Index). Children who evidence symptoms of PTSD soon after the disaster are more likely to experience PTSD many months after the disaster. Children who are in the Severe or Very Severe levels of PTSD on the Reaction Index should be carefully monitored.

The main symptoms of PTSD are as follows:

- Reexperiencing of the disaster during play, dreams, or flashbacks. For example, a child may:
 - Repeatedly act out what happened in the disaster when playing with toys
 - Have many distressing dreams about the disaster
 - Be distressed when exposed to events that resemble the disaster or at the anniversary of the disaster
 - Act or feel as if the disaster is happening again
- Avoidance of reminders of the disaster or general numbness to all emotional topics. For example, a child may:
 - Avoid all activities that remind him/her of the disaster
 - Be unable to remember parts of the disaster
 - Withdraw from other people
 - Have difficulty feeling positive feelings
- Increased "arousal" symptoms. For example, a child may
 - Have difficulty falling or staying asleep
 - Be irritable
 - Have difficulty concentrating
 - Startle more easily

B. Additional psychological predictors to identify children at risk

- Children who use ineffective ways of coping with stress such as denial, passivity, or avoidance. For example, children who make statements like:
 - "I wished the bad things had never happened" (Denial)
 - "I didn't do anything because the bad things can't be fixed" (Passivity)
 - "I tried to forget it all the time" (Avoidance)

- Other major stressful events happened to them after the disaster such as their parents divorced, a parent lost his/her job, or a new sibling was born

- Insufficient or diminished social support from the child's family, friends, and/or teachers. For example, a child who
 - Feels alone
 - Doesn't have anyone to share his/her feelings with
 - Doesn't have anyone to spend time with
 - Has to relocate following a disaster
 - Has friends who move away because of the disaster

- Girls are more likely than boys to report long term symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress such as being nervous, having more stomachaches, fearing another disaster, or feeling more alone.

III. Behavioral Issues:

The information in this section was adapted from "How to Help Children After a Disaster: A Guidebook for Teachers", "Coping with Children's Reactions to Hurricanes and Other Disasters", and "Helping Children Cope with a Traumatic Event" (see Bibliography for full references).

If children are having any of the following problems soon after the disaster, they may be at a higher risk for long term difficulties:

- Frequent aggressive outbursts
- Large decline in academic performance
- Withdrawal from activities and play with other children
- Frequent complaints of nausea, headaches, stomachaches
- Persistent avoidance of being alone
- Dangerous risk-taking behavior
- Continued preoccupation with the disaster as a primary focus in life
- Persistent refusal to attend school

DISASTER ACTIVITIES: INTRODUCTION

The main elements within the activities:

Many types of activities have been used to help children adapt successfully following a disaster such as a hurricane. This project focused on three key components that have been used in many of the interventions reported in the research literature:

- Exposure to and discussion of disaster-related events
- Promotion of positive coping and problem solving skills
- Strengthening of children's friendships and peer support

Exposure to and discussion of disaster-related events. Research suggests that repeated presentation of disaster related material helps to reduce the emotional distress following such events. This suggests that children need an opportunity to talk about their experiences in a safe, accepting environment in order to recover from the disaster. The activities in this project achieve this goal by providing many chances for children to discuss their experiences guided by class rules that ensure respect for other children's opinions. Since individual children are likely to respond differently to various techniques of expression, the activities use a range of methods including both verbal and nonverbal expression, and varying modalities (drawings, stories, audio and video recordings).

Promotion of positive coping and problem solving skills. Research suggests that the development of positive strategies and problem solving skills can improve children's management of the stressors after a disaster. The activities in this project achieve this goal by including methods to teach and apply problem-solving skills for disaster-related stressors. The children are encouraged to develop positive, realistic methods of coping that increase their feelings of control over their own anxiety. They also are encouraged to identify which coping strategies fit which types of situations.

Strengthening of children's friendships and peer support. Research has shown that children with strong emotional support from others are better able to cope and adjust in stressful situations. Children's relationships with peers help to decrease isolation and to give suggestions for how to react and cope with difficulties. However, in many disaster situations, usual friendships are disrupted due to the relocation of families. In addition, family members may be less available to provide support to children because of their own distress following a disaster. Therefore, it is important for children to develop supportive relationships with their classmates and with their teachers. Research has suggested that involving children in small group activities can achieve several of these purposes. The activities in this project encourage children to work cooperatively in small groups toward a common goal, to enhance peer support.

Guidelines for small group activities:

In order to encourage the development of supportive friendships among classmates, it is advisable to use the following strategies during the classroom activities:

- **Form small groups of 4 to 6 children.**
- **Mix up usual clusters of children.** This exposes the children to others who may be potential friends, and allows children who may not be as popular to interact with more popular children. It is best if the teacher puts together the groups, rather than allowing the children to choose their own teams, so that they have the opportunity to get to know other classmates better.
- **Give shy or unpopular children the opportunity to be a group captain.** This encourages their interaction with the rest of the children.
- **Do not mix boys and girls within the small groups.** Most children at this age would be more likely to form a friendship with someone of the same sex.

Guidelines for leading a discussion with children:

1. **Ask the children themselves to evaluate their functioning.** It is very important to ask the children themselves how they are doing rather than relying on the reports of their parents or on their behavior. Sometimes children do not express their difficulties in order to protect the adults around them. Children need the opportunity to discuss their feelings while believing that they will be accepted and supported during the process.
2. **Express your own feelings outside of the classroom.** If you were also affected by the disaster, it helps to express your feelings outside of the classroom before you discuss these topics with the children. This will allow you to listen more effectively to the children.
3. **Use open ended questions.** The best types of questions to use are “open ended” which means that they cannot be answered by a “yes” or “no” only. Questions that are helpful often begin with words such as “What?” “How?” “Which?” or “When?”.
4. **Be a good listener.** It is best for you to listen to and promote the children’s expressions of feelings rather than controlling the discussion yourself.
5. **Do not require participation.** Do not require all children to participate in the discussion. Many children may not feel comfortable sharing their feelings in a group or may not be ready to discuss these topics. Children can benefit from just listening to the comments of others.

6. Acknowledge and normalize children’s statements. When the children express their feelings, it will be helpful for you to acknowledge their statements by making comments such as “It sounds like you were very angry” or “That part made you feel sad”. It is also important to help normalize their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors with comments such as “Lots of kids who go through a disaster feel that way” or “It’s o.k. to feel angry about that”.

When to use the activities:

Since Hurricane Andrew struck South Florida in August, the activities were developed for the holidays and events that occurred chronologically as the children moved from September through the school year. However, many of the activities can be adapted for other holidays and events that occur after a disaster during any part of the year. For instance, the activity developed for the first major holiday following Hurricane Andrew (Thanksgiving), can be adapted for any other holiday that emphasizes being thankful. The activity developed for the New Year, could be adapted for any time of “new beginnings,” such as the beginning of the school year. In this way, the activities can be made relevant for a wide variety of situations and timepoints.

Additional guidelines when implementing the activities:

- The activities in this manual are designed to be used with elementary school age children. However, each professional should adapt the material to the particular age and level of the children.
- The activities are designed as independent units and thus there is some repetitive material within them.
- The activities are designed to decrease distress and enhance positive outcomes, and have been used successfully in numerous classrooms. In the unlikely event that the discussion of disaster related material causes a child to become distressed, the teacher should notify the school counselor or psychologist for additional help.

Post-Disaster Activity: Thanksgiving

WHEN TO USE THE ACTIVITY _____

Thanksgiving holiday that occurs after the disaster. Can also be adapted to the first major holiday that occurs after the disaster.

HOW LONG IT WILL TAKE _____

Approximately 40 minutes

WHO SHOULD USE THE ACTIVITY _____

Teachers with the whole classroom or with a small group of children
Counselors with the whole classroom or with a small group of children

OBJECTIVES FOR STUDENTS _____

1. To help children develop realistic expectations about the Thanksgiving holiday following the disaster, in order to avoid possible disappointment.
2. To help the children make plans for the holiday, and to generate strategies for coping with the changes that may occur in this year's celebration. Discussions like this can help improve children's coping because they give them an increased sense of control and predictability.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION _____

1. Ways that things may be different for families this year. For some children, the disaster may have a major impact on some long-standing family traditions. It may be difficult for families to do things in the same ways as previous years for a number of reasons, including:

- a. **Material resources.** Important objects used in previous Thanksgivings may have been lost (e.g., special serving bowls or sentimental objects). In some cases, materials used to prepare a Thanksgiving dinner may not be available (e.g., adequate cooking or storage facilities).
- b. **Financial resources.** For many families, the cost of an elaborate meal may be prohibitive.
- c. **Personal resources.** Parents may be fatigued, or may feel they cannot take off much time from rebuilding chores or work. They may not be able to spend time during the holiday on family outings or playing with the children. In addition, preexisting family problems may have become worse because of the additional strains on parents.

- d. **Emotional resources.** It is normal for both adults and children to feel a sense of loss, sadness, or numbness following a disaster. However, during a holiday the expectation is that one should feel joyful. This conflict may be difficult for some parents and children.

MATERIALS NEEDED _____

Handout on Thanksgiving for each child
Pencil for each child

PROCEDURES _____

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

1: Introduce the activity. Give the rationale that this will be an opportunity to think and talk about the upcoming Thanksgiving holiday. Note that things may be different for many families this year because of the disaster, and that it helps to think and talk about how things may be different ahead of time. Also remind them that the spirit of Thanksgiving is to recognize the things they have to be thankful for, and to give thanks for these things.

2: Introduce the rules for the activity. The most important group rules are:

- A. **Show respect for the thoughts and feelings of others.** This includes listening attentively to others and letting others talk. Things to avoid include laughing at or teasing other children, or saying that someone's thoughts are wrong or silly.
- B. **Share your thoughts and experiences with others.** By discussing feelings and thoughts, the children can find ways to make themselves feel better, and can learn that their experiences are common reactions that are shared with others.

PART 2: CLASS DISCUSSION

1: Ask the children to generate memories of Thanksgiving. Ask the children to write down or draw a quick picture of what they like most about Thanksgiving under Number 1 on their Handout.

Remind the children that they can write or draw about favorite foods, favorite activities (e.g., playing with family members, eating a big meal, telling or hearing family stories), and/or favorite feelings from Thanksgiving (e.g., feeling happy, feeling safe, feeling full).

Take a quick survey of the children's favorite foods, activities, and feelings, and write these on the blackboard.

2: Discuss changes in Thanksgiving this year.

- Ask the children to think about how things may be different for them this year (see Number 2 on their Handout).
- Go over the things listed under the three categories above (foods, activities, and feelings), and ask for each thing whether this will be different this year.
- Have the children also evaluate why things may be different this year (keep in mind the background information).

3: Discuss the children's feelings about the changes. Ask how the kids may feel if things are different this year (see Number 2 on their Handout). It may help if the children can talk about how it may be hard for other children if things are much different this year (many children are more forthcoming if they are talking about how things affect other children, rather than themselves). Suggest that some children might feel disappointed, others might feel angry, some might feel cheated, some might feel sad.

4: Discuss what children are most thankful for. Ask the children to think about the one thing they can be most thankful for this Thanksgiving. Ask them to write down or draw a picture of the one thing they are most thankful for this year (Number 3 on their Handout). Once again, write down some of the different things on the blackboard.

5: Discuss how children can show their thankfulness. Following this, ask for suggestions of ways to show that they are thankful (see Number 4 on their Handout). It is important to evaluate with the children whether kids can really carry out the suggestions made.

Encourage the children to write down or draw a picture of (Number 5 on their Handout) the thing(s) they are thankful for. Encourage the children to write down or draw a picture of some ways to show their thankfulness. Point out that everyone can find something to be thankful for, but a person may sometimes need help figuring out what these things are.

It may help to tell the children that you want to hear what way they picked to show their thankfulness, when they return after the holiday.

HANDOUT: THANKSGIVING

This is not a test. There are no right or wrong answers.

Wait for directions from your teacher before you fill out each item.

1. Finish the following sentence with **words or a picture**:

My favorite things about Thanksgiving usually have been _____

HANDOUT: THANKSGIVING

2. **CLASS DISCUSSION** (Do not write anything here, but do listen and participate in the class discussion)

Question 1. How will things be different for you and your family this year?

Question 2. How might children feel if things are different for them this year?

WAIT FOR INSTRUCTIONS FROM YOUR TEACHER BEFORE CONTINUING

3. Think about the different things you can be thankful for this year. Write down or draw pictures of some of these things, then **pick out the one thing you are most thankful for this year.**

WAIT FOR INSTRUCTIONS FROM YOUR TEACHER BEFORE CONTINUING

HANDOUT: THANKSGIVING

4. **CLASS DISCUSSION** (Do not write anything here, but do listen and participate in the class discussion)

Question 1. What are some ways children can show that they are thankful?

WAIT FOR INSTRUCTIONS FROM YOUR TEACHER BEFORE CONTINUING

5. Write down or draw pictures of some ways to show your thankfulness.

TAKE THIS SHEET HOME WITH YOU, SO YOU CAN REMEMBER THESE THINGS DURING THE HOLIDAY!

Post-Disaster Activity: Holidays

WHEN TO USE THE ACTIVITY _____

During the Christmas/Hanukkah holiday season

HOW LONG IT WILL TAKE _____

Approximately 40 minutes

WHO SHOULD USE THE ACTIVITY _____

Teachers with the whole classroom or with a small group of children

Counselors with the whole classroom or with a small group of children

OBJECTIVES FOR STUDENTS _____

1. To help children develop realistic expectations about the holiday season, in order to avoid possible disappointment.
2. To emphasize to the children that the true meaning of the holidays is family togetherness, hope, and love.
3. To help the children make plans for the holiday, and to generate strategies for coping with the changes that may occur in this year's celebration. Discussions like this can help improve children's coping because they give them an increased sense of control and predictability.
4. To strengthen socially supportive relationships among the children by encouraging them to work cooperatively in small groups.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION _____

1. Ways that things may be different for families this year. For some children, the disaster may have a major impact on some long-standing family traditions. It may be difficult for families to do things in the same ways as previous years for a number of reasons, including:

- a. **Material resources.** Important objects used in previous holidays may have been lost (e.g., special decorations or sentimental objects). In some cases, materials used to prepare a full holiday dinner may not be available (e.g., adequate cooking or storage facilities).
- b. **Financial resources.** For many families, the cost of an elaborate meal may be prohibitive. Gift-giving may be less than usual, and fewer decorations will be used.

- c. **Personal resources.** Parents may be fatigued, or may feel they cannot take off much time from rebuilding chores or work. Shopping requires a lot of effort, and many parents feel considerable stress from trying to meet the demands of the holidays. Thus, time that may have been spent on family outings or play with children may be less this year. Parents may also be more short-tempered than usual. In addition, preexisting family problems may have become worse because of the additional strains on parents.

- d. **Emotional resources.** It is normal for both adults and children to feel a sense of loss, sadness, or numbness following a disaster. However, during a holiday the expectation is that one should feel joyful. This conflict may be difficult for some parents and children.

MATERIALS NEEDED _____

- One piece of lined paper for each child
- Pencil for each child
- Newsprint or other large paper divided into large sections
- Crayons or markers for drawing

PROCEDURES _____

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

1: Introduce the activity. Give the rationale that this will be an opportunity to think and talk about the upcoming holiday. Note that things may be different for many families this year because of the disaster, and that it helps to think and talk about how things may be different ahead of time. Also emphasize to them that the spirit of these holidays is family togetherness, hope, love, and caring.

2: Introduce the rules for the activity. The most important group rules are:

- A. Show respect for the thoughts and feelings of others.** This includes listening attentively to others and letting others talk. Things to avoid include laughing at or teasing other children, or saying that someone's thoughts are wrong or silly.

 - B. Share your thoughts and experiences with others.** By discussing feelings and thoughts, the children can find ways to make themselves feel better, and can learn that their experiences are common reactions that are shared with others.
-

PART 2: CLASS DISCUSSION

1: Discuss the meaning of the holidays for the children. Discuss with the children the most important aspects of the holidays. Emphasize to the children that the true meaning of the holidays is family togetherness, hope, and love.

2: Discuss common activities that occur during the holidays. Ask the children to generate common activities during their holidays. Some examples may include family activities, time off from school to do fun things, time to show others that you care about them, giving gifts, etc.

3: Discuss how the holidays may be different this year. Begin the Activity by telling the children: “A common activity during the holidays is giving or receiving gifts. This might be different or hard this year. Why is this?”

Help the children discuss reasons why things might be different or hard this year. See how many of the points raised in the Background Information section come up in the discussion, and prompt them to recognize any points they miss.

4: Discuss children’s feelings about the differences. Ask how kids may feel if things are different this year. It may help if the children can talk about how it may be hard for other children if things are much different this year (many children are more forthcoming if they are talking about how things affect other children, rather than themselves). Suggest that some children might feel disappointed, others might feel angry, some might feel cheated, some might feel sad.

5: Discuss ways of giving. Ask the children to talk about the idea of giving, and especially different ways of giving (other than buying things). Write on the board some examples of different ways of giving that the children come up with. Help by suggesting categories of giving, if necessary (e.g., doing something “nice” for a family member, neighbor, or classmate; making a gift).

6: Encourage class discussion about giving. Have the class discuss the following 3 questions:

1. “How do you feel when someone does something nice for you?”
2. “How do you feel when you do something nice for another person?”
3. “How do other people feel when you do something nice for them?”

Emphasize that this kind of giving (doing something for others) is just as important as giving other types of gifts, because it takes your time, effort, and thought.

PART 3: SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY

1: Divide the children into small groups. The final part of this activity should be done in small groups, if at all possible. Divide the children according to the following guidelines (see page 20 for more detailed guidelines):

- Form small groups of 4 to 6 children.
- Mix up usual clusters of children
- Give shy or unpopular children the opportunity to be a group captain
- Do not mix boys and girls within the small groups

Tell the children “For this first part, we need to divide up into teams.” Announce the composition of the groups, and have each group or “team” sit together.

2: Ask children to plan how to “give” to others this holiday. Once you divide the class into groups, tell each child “to make a list of people they want to “give” to this holiday season”. Encourage the children to help their “teammates” out with this (e.g., who might have been forgotten on their list).

Next, children in each team “should figure out some ways they can give to the people on their list”. Encourage the kids to come up with very specific examples, such as “I can give my mom a break by cleaning up my room without her having to bug me.”

3: Ask children to make a group drawing. Ask each team to “make a group drawing showing some kids giving to some of the people on their lists” on the newsprint or large paper.

4: Have a captain from each team give an example. End the activity by having each “team captain” show or tell about one specific example from their group.

Post-Disaster Activity: Hope/New Beginnings

WHEN TO USE THE ACTIVITY _____

During the change to a new year if it falls several months or more after the disaster. Can also be adapted for use at the beginning of a school year or at the one year anniversary of the disaster.

HOW LONG IT WILL TAKE _____

Approximately 40 minutes

WHO SHOULD USE THE ACTIVITY _____

Teachers with the whole classroom or with a small group of children

Counselors with the whole classroom or with a small group of children

OBJECTIVES FOR STUDENTS _____

1. To provide an opportunity for children to recognize how much things have improved at school, and at home, in order to increase their hope or optimism for the future.
2. To help the children identify realistic, attainable personal goals for the next several months, and to generate ways to achieve them.
3. To strengthen socially supportive relationships among the children by encouraging them to work cooperatively in small groups.

MATERIALS NEEDED _____

Scotch Tape

Handout on Hope cut into 4 sections with one category on each piece

Pencil for each child

One piece of lined paper for each child

Treats or special privileges for the winning teams

PROCEDURES

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

1: Introduce the activity. Give the rationale that this will be an opportunity to think about and make plans for the new year. Note that it sometimes helps to look at where you have been in deciding where you are going, and thus you will want them to think about how things have changed since the disaster.

2: Introduce the rules for the activity. The most important group rules are:

- A. Show respect for the thoughts and feelings of others.** This includes listening attentively to others and letting others talk. Things to avoid include laughing at or teasing other children, or saying that someone's thoughts are wrong or silly.
- B. Share your thoughts and experiences with others.** By discussing feelings and thoughts, the children can find ways to make themselves feel better, and can learn that their experiences are common reactions that are shared with others.

PART 2: SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY

1: Introduce the idea of setting goals. Begin the Activity by telling the children: "We have now begun a new year. Many people make plans for the new year, sometimes by making New Year's Resolutions." Ask the children to give an example or two of these. "Today, I want to help you make some goals for the New Year, and get you to plan some ways to reach these goals." Ask kids to tell you what the words "goals" and "plans" mean to them. You may want to suggest that a goal is a "wish that you can make come true," and a plan is "a way to make the wish come true."

2: Divide the children into small groups. The next part of this activity should be done in small groups, if at all possible. Divide the children according to the following guidelines (see page 20 for more detailed guidelines):

- Form small groups of 4 to 6 children.
- Mix up usual clusters of children
- Give shy or unpopular children the opportunity to be a group captain
- Do not mix boys and girls within the small groups

Tell the children “For this first part, we need to divide up into teams.” Announce the composition of the groups, and have each group or “team” sit together.

3: Explain the small group activity. Once you divide the class into groups, tell the children: “In order to set goals for the new year, it helps to look back at the last year. The disaster made things very difficult for a lot of people here. I’d like you to take some time to think back to the way things were right after the disaster and then figure out how things have gotten better since then. We’ll see which group can come up with the most things. I want ideas in four different categories: How things have gotten better

- (1) at home
- (2) at school
- (3) with friends
- (4) inside of you (‘inside of you’ means to tell how your thoughts or feelings have changed for the better since the disaster).

Let’s see which team can come up with the most things in each category and the most things overall. The winning team in each way will get special recognition (or a treat or privilege).”

4: Ask the groups to list how things have improved since the disaster. Pass out the recording forms (Handout). Each child is responsible for one of these pieces. At the end of this activity, these pieces should be taped together to make a whole, this emphasizes the importance of teamwork. Only the child in charge of his or her piece is allowed to write “ways things have gotten better” for that category, although teammates should help each other with suggestions of things to list in each category. Allow approximately 15 minutes for this part.

- It is very important to circulate from group to group to make sure that the children are cooperating and that the rules are followed regarding each team member having a specific list to write. Teammates can give each other suggestions for the different categories, but cannot write for another person.

Once the allotted time has passed, instruct the children to assemble the pieces and tape their team’s pieces together to make a rectangle.

5: Have a captain for each team announce items from their list. Appoint a “team captain” for each team. The captain is the only team member allowed to speak for the group during this step of the activity. Going from team to team, ask the captain to tell one item from a category on their team’s list. Keep a running list on the board, and keep going until all of the unique responses have been listed.

Collect the taped together final list from each group. Use these to decide which teams came up with the most ideas for each category, and the most ideas overall.

PART 3: CLASS DISCUSSION

1: Discuss the idea of hope and new beginnings. Ask the children to talk about the idea of hope together as class. Be sure to emphasize the idea of hope in the context of hopefulness or optimism. Point out that hope helps people keep going during difficult times, and that children and adults can sometimes help make the things they hope for come true or happen.

2: Have the children pick one thing that they hope for. Next, point out that although many things are better now than they were after the disaster, there are still many things to hope for. Ask each child to think of one thing he or she really wants to see happen during the upcoming year, and to write that thing down on a sheet of paper. Allow a few minutes, then ask for examples from the class.

3: Discuss the difference between realistic and unrealistic goals. For each example given, help the class evaluate whether a child can help that hope come true, and how this might be done. Continue this process until the children seem to understand the difference between things they could hope for and help to happen (e.g., make new friends, get better grades, worry less about disasters) versus things they could hope for but do very little to influence (e.g., become rich, build a new house).

4: Have the children pick a realistic goal and plan. After this distinction is clear, ask the children to write down one important thing that they hope for and can realistically help to happen. Next, ask the children to write down at least two things they can do to help the “hope” they listed occur. Encourage the children to save this paper so they can remind themselves of their goals and plans.

HANDOUT: HOPE

Ways things have gotten better at school:

Written by: _____

Ways things have gotten better at home:

Written by: _____

HANDOUT: HOPE

Ways things have gotten better with friends

Written by: _____

Ways things have gotten better inside of kids

Written by: _____

Post-Disaster Activity: Conflict Reduction

WHEN TO USE THE ACTIVITY _____

Several months after the disaster

HOW LONG IT WILL TAKE _____

Approximately 60 minutes

WHO SHOULD USE THE ACTIVITY _____

Teachers with the whole classroom or with a small group of children

Counselors with the whole classroom or with a small group of children

OBJECTIVES FOR STUDENTS _____

1. To provide an opportunity for children to recognize how the buildup of fatigue and frustration can lead to more expressions of anger or conflict, at home and school.
2. To help the children identify realistic strategies to cope with their own feelings of irritability, sadness, or anger, and also how to respond appropriately to displays of anger or upset from others.
3. To strengthen socially supportive relationships among the children by encouraging them to work cooperatively in small groups.

MATERIALS NEEDED _____

Scotch Tape

Handouts on Conflict Reduction cut into four sections with one category on each piece

Large sheet of poster board to record class' best ideas

PROCEDURES _____

PART 1: INTRODUCTION

1: Introduce the activity. Give the rationale that this will be an opportunity to think and talk about how things are going for them at home and school this year, and to try to help them think of some ways to make things go better for them. Note that it has been a difficult year in many ways because of the disaster and the process of rebuilding.

2: Introduce the rules for the activity. The most important group rules are:

A. Show respect for the thoughts and feelings of others. This includes listening attentively to others and letting others talk. Things to avoid include laughing at or teasing other children, or saying that someone’s thoughts are wrong or silly.

B. Share your thoughts and experiences with others. By discussing feelings and thoughts, the children can find ways to make themselves feel better, and can learn that their experiences are common reactions that are shared with others.

PART 2: CLASS DISCUSSION

1: Discuss ways that things are still difficult for children and adults. Tell the children: “The disaster really made things difficult for a lot of kids this year. Even though many things have gotten better recently, there are still some things from the disaster that make life harder at school and home. Let’s see if we can say what some of those things are.” Have the children give some examples of ways the disaster is still making things harder for them at home with their parents, and at school with their friends. List these things on the board under the headings:

For kids

At home with parents

At school with friends

Next, explain that it is important also to understand how things may be harder for their parents and teachers at home and at work. Have the children give some examples of ways the disaster is still making things harder for their parents and teachers. List these things on the board under the headings:

For parents and teachers

At home

At work

Discuss the similarities and differences between the lists for kids and adults.

2. Discuss how extra difficulties make children and adults feel. Next, discuss how these difficulties might make kids and adults feel and act differently than usual. Write some of the children’s ideas about this on the board. If the children do not come up with increased tiredness, anger, frustration, sadness, “being upset” and “acting bad,” ask whether the children think these feelings and behaviors come from the difficulties identified above.

3: Discuss ways to make themselves feel better. Tell the children: “There are different things you can do when you feel angry, upset or sad, and also when someone else acts angry or upset or mean towards you. Some of these things to do are better than others. We will be talking about this more later. Some examples of good things to do include (Write these on the blackboard under the heading “Things that usually make things better”):

- TALK TO OTHERS ABOUT HOW YOU FEEL
- DO SOMETHING TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM
- RELAX YOURSELF
- DO SOMETHING FUN
- ASK FOR HELP TO SOLVE THE PROBLEM.

4: Discuss things that may make them feel worse. Tell the children: “Things that usually make things worse for you include (Write these on the blackboard):

- HITTING
- YELLING
- KEEPING YOUR THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS INSIDE
- BLAMING OTHERS FOR THINGS THAT HAPPEN
- ACTING WITHOUT THINKING

PART 3: SMALL GROUP ACTIVITY

1: Divide the class into small groups. The next part of this activity should be done in small groups, if at all possible. Divide the children according to the following guidelines (see page 20 for more detailed guidelines):

- Form small groups of 4 to 6 children.
- Mix up usual clusters of children
- Give shy or unpopular children the opportunity to be a group captain
- Do not mix boys and girls within the small groups

Tell the children “For this first part, we need to divide up into teams.” Announce the composition of the groups, and have each group or “team” sit together.

2: Explain the small group activity. Once you divide the class into groups, tell the children that each team has the following task: Tell the children “In order to make things go better for the rest of the year, it helps to think of ways to help yourself and others when some of the bad feelings or behaviors we just talked about happen. We’d like you to take some time to think of things you can do when you feel angry, tired, upset, or sad, and also things you can do when others act that way. We’ll see which group can come up with the most things. I want ideas in four different categories:

- Things kids can do when they feel angry.
- Things kids can do when they feel sad or upset.
- Things kids can do when someone else acts angry with them.
- Things kids can do when someone else acts upset or sad.

Let’s see which team can come up with the best ideas. You should help your teammates come up with ideas”.

3: Ask groups to list strategies to help them to feel better. Pass out the recording form. Each form should be cut into four pieces, with a category on each. Each child is responsible for one of these pieces. Tell the children: “Each of you has a piece of paper with a statement on it. Everyone in your group has a different statement to answer. Help your teammates come up with ideas to write down. However, only you are allowed to write on the piece of paper you were given. At the end of this activity, these pieces will be taped together to show how well your team did” (this emphasizes the importance of teamwork). Allow approximately 15 minutes for this part.

- It is very important to circulate from group to group to make sure that the children are cooperating and that the rules are followed regarding each team member having a specific list to write. Teammates can give each other suggestions for the different categories, but cannot write for another person.

Once the allotted time has passed, instruct the children to assemble the pieces and tape their team's pieces together to make a big square.

4: Have captain for each team announce items from their list. Identify a “team captain” for each team. The captain is the only team member allowed to speak for the group during this step of the activity. Going from team to team, ask the captain to tell one item from their team’s list for one of their categories. Keep a running list on the blackboard, and keep going until all of the unique responses have been listed.

5: Make a final list of ideas to display in classroom. Collect the taped final list from each group. These can be used to select the best ideas in each category on the large sheet of posterboard. Teachers and counselors can use these “best ideas” when conflicts or hurt feelings

show up in the classroom. It is important to do this, because children will need to be prompted to use these strategies when the occasion arises.

6: Teach the children a way to remember good strategies to use. Tell the children that an easy way to remember good ideas for making themselves feel better is to “Be a STAR”. STAR stands for:

- S = Something Fun to do
- T = Talk to others
- A = Ask for help
- R = Relax before you act.

Write this acronym on the posterboard with the best ideas, and encourage children to use it within the classroom.

HANDOUT: CONFLICT REDUCTION

Things kids can do when they feel angry.

Written by: _____

Things kids can do when they feel sad or upset.

Written by _____

HANDOUT: CONFLICT REDUCTION

Things kids can do when someone else acts angry with them.

Written by:_____

Things kids can do when someone else acts upset or sad.

Written by:_____

Post-Disaster Activity: Dealing with Losses

WHEN TO USE THE ACTIVITY _____

Any time after the disaster. May work particularly well with those children who lost possessions in the disaster.

HOW LONG WILL IT TAKE _____

Approximately 30 minutes

WHO SHOULD USE THE ACTIVITY _____

May be used with whole classroom by teachers

May be used in small group lead by counselor or psychologist with those children who were most affected by losses after the disaster

OBJECTIVES FOR STUDENTS _____

1. To help children acknowledge the losses they may have experienced during the disaster, and to reestablish a sense of hope for them.
2. To allow children to provide and share information on different reactions to loss.

MATERIALS NEEDED _____

Piece of blank paper for each child

Pencil for each child

Handout of drawing described below (if desired)

PROCEDURES _____

1: Have children write or draw losses from the disaster. Ask each child to write down or draw a picture of some of the things they lost during the disaster. If they lost nothing, ask them to write about things other people they know lost.

2: Write examples of losses on blackboard. As a group, come up with a list of things that children lost during or after the disaster, and write these things on the board. It may help to put things in different categories (e.g., toys, clothes, plants, pets, household objects).

3: Discuss nonmaterial losses. Ask about things the children lost that aren't easy to name, and may not be something that you can see or touch (e.g., sense of safety). Write these down as well.

4: Discuss children's feelings about the losses. Once lists are made, ask what different children think or feel about losing these different things. Point out that different people think and feel different things, and that it hurts to lose something important to you.

5: Have the children focus on what they did not lose. Ask the children to write down or draw things that they did not lose as a result of the disaster. Try to encourage the children to focus on some of the positive things that they still have.

6: Have the children complete a drawing on losses. Pass out a drawing of one child talking to another with "thought bubbles" over head. One bubble will have the words: "I may have lost some things in the disaster, but I still have...". Each child should be encouraged to finish the sentence, and take a few minutes to color or add to the drawing.

COUNSELING CHILDREN REGARDING INTRUSIVE THOUGHTS OR FLASHBACKS

WHEN TO USE THE ACTIVITY _____

Any time following the disaster

WHO SHOULD USE THE ACTIVITY _____

School counselors or psychologists with small groups of children or individual children

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO ADDRESS CHILDREN'S FLASHBACKS? _____

Intrusive thoughts or flashbacks regarding the disaster can be troubling to a number of children in several ways:

1. These cognitive events may be seen by the child, peers, or adults as a sign of “being crazy” or “emotionally disturbed”.
2. Flashbacks and intrusive thoughts can interfere with school performance by disrupting concentration or increasing emotional arousal. It can also become difficult for children who experience these phenomena to move on and put the disaster behind them.
3. Flashbacks and intrusive thoughts may lead to avoidance or constriction of activity as the child tries to avoid cues that may trigger intrusive thoughts or flashbacks.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP _____

1. **Explain what an intrusive thought or flashback is.** Raise the issue of intrusive thoughts or flashbacks in terms the children can understand, such as, “some kids have times when they think about the bad things that happened even when they do not want to,” or “some kids have times when they see or feel scary things about the disaster in their minds.” Children are probably more likely to report these thoughts to you individually or in small groups.
2. **Have children discuss their intrusive thoughts or flashbacks.** Hold a small group session with several (4 to 6) children of similar age and gender who report being bothered by intrusive thoughts. Invite them to talk about what they see and feel. This can also be implemented on an individual basis with one child. Discuss the following material:

- Ask them why they think this happens, and what it might mean. This is a chance to clear up misconceptions, and to provide factual information.
- Ask them to tell what they see and feel. Some children may need to draw or write what they see and feel at first, rather than say it out loud.
- Tell the children that it is common to have intrusive thoughts and flashbacks after really scary things happen. Not everyone has them, but many people do. We do not know why some children (and adults) experience them after very frightening things happen while others do not.
- Add that intrusive thoughts and flashbacks can cause trouble for children for the reasons listed under the section “Why is it important to address children’s flashbacks.” Explain that this is why you will help them get over having these things.

STRATEGIES YOU CAN TEACH CHILDREN TO USE —

1. Teach children to keep track of their thoughts. Explain to the children that it can be helpful to them to keep track of their thoughts about the disaster.

- Ask them to describe the most recent time they “thought about the disaster when they did not want to.”
- Ask them to describe the situation they were in, and the thought or picture that was in their head.
- Give them some examples of situations that might trigger these thoughts: seeing a picture of damage from the disaster, hearing thunder, being alone, etc.
- Teach them to rate these thoughts on a scale from 0 to 4 where 0 is “did not feel upset” and 4 is “was very, very upset.”

2. Ask children to monitor their thoughts over the next week. Have them use the monitor sheet included on page 63. Have them write down the information as soon as possible after the flashback or intrusive thought begins. Go over these records with each child the following week. If you do not follow up, the children will not do this. Be careful to be especially accepting and nonjudgemental about children’s reports. It will help them to tell you about these thoughts, rather than keeping them to themselves. Teach the children to reassure themselves that these thoughts are common and that things are going to return to normal soon.

3. **Referring to outside professionals.** If there are children who continue to experience frequent intrusive thoughts that are very upsetting to them, they may need to be referred to an outside professional for additional assistance.

MONITOR SHEET FOR BAD THOUGHTS ABOUT THE DISASTER

NAME: _____

<u>Date</u>	<u>Situation</u>	<u>Thought or Picture in Head</u>	<u>Rating 0-4</u>
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Discussion Activity Ideas

Portions of this section were adapted with permission from “How to Help Children After a Disaster: A Guidebook for Teachers” which was designed in California following the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989, and from “Coping with Fear and Stress: An Activity Guide Grades K-8” by Robinson, Rotter, Fey, and Vogel.

WHEN TO USE THE ACTIVITY _____

Any time following a disaster

HOW LONG IT WILL TAKE _____

15 - 30 minutes

WHO SHOULD USE THE ACTIVITY _____

May be used with the whole classroom by teachers.

May be used with an individual child or in a small group lead by a counselor, psychologist, or teacher

OBJECTIVES FOR STUDENTS _____

To allow children the opportunity to express their feelings and concerns with others in a safe and supportive environment. This can help them feel they are not alone with their thoughts and feelings. It also can help them to develop ways to make themselves feel better.

POSSIBLE ACTIVITIES _____

The following are suggestions for activities that promote discussion about children’s feelings and thoughts:

- Use puppets to tell a story about the disaster
- Use photos, drawings, or a video to start a discussion (see the Annotated Bibliography for suggestions for videos to use)
- Make a skit, play, or role-play related to the disaster. Provide relevant “dress-up” clothes, and other disaster related items if possible.
- Do a show and tell about the disaster
- Ask the children to share a story about what happened to them during the disaster
- Ask the children to write a story about “What I do and don’t like about the rain (or the wind)”.

- Play a “feelings game” where you have a bag filled with people with different facial expressions (from magazines or your own drawings) and you ask a child to pick one. Have the child guess the feeling of the person and ask them to tell about a time that they have felt that way.
- Have the children write poems about the disaster for the school newspaper or for a classroom booklet.
- Read a story about storms to the children or have them read it to themselves. Have a discussion about how the characters in the story felt and how they made themselves feel better. Have the children relate that to their own experiences.

The following are suggested questions to use when discussing the event with children:

Where were you when it happened?
 What were you doing?
 Where was your family?
 Where were your friends?
 What was your first thought when it happened?
 What were you thinking during it?
 What did you see?
 What changed after the disaster?
 What do you miss most after the disaster?
 What did you hear?
 What sound did it make?
 What did you do after it?
 What did you lose?
 How did you feel?
 What did other people around you do (during, after)?
 What happened to the animals around you?
 What dreams did you have after it?
 What reminds you of it? When do you think about it?
 What do you do differently since the disaster?
 How do you feel now?
 What makes you feel better?
 How have you gotten through rough times before?
 What would you do differently if it happened again?
 How did you help others? How would you help next time?

Drawing Activity Ideas

This section was adapted with permission from “How to Help Children After a Disaster: A Guidebook for Teachers” and from examples provided in the videotape entitled “Children and Trauma: The School’s Response.” These resources were both developed in California following the Loma Prieta earthquake in 1989.

WHEN TO USE THE ACTIVITY _____

Any time following a disaster

HOW LONG IT WILL TAKE _____

15 - 30 minutes

WHO SHOULD USE THE ACTIVITY _____

May be used with the whole classroom by teachers

May be used with an individual child or in a small group lead by a counselor, psychologist, or teacher

OBJECTIVES FOR STUDENTS _____

To allow children to express their emotions through drawing activities, which may be easier for some children than talking. Children need the opportunity to express their feelings with others in a safe and supportive environment. This can help them feel less isolated and help them to develop coping strategies.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION _____

The following are suggestions to keep in mind when leading a drawing activity:

- Tell the children that they can draw in whatever manner they would like. Accept the full range of responses as valid. Tell them that their work will not be graded or judged.
- Allow children to discard their artwork if they make that choice.
- Allow the use of various mediums if possible (crayons, pastels, pencils, markers, etc.).
- Do not draw for them or attempt to control what they create.
- Do not require all of the children to draw pictures.

POSSIBLE ACTIVITIES

The following are suggestions for drawing activities that promote expression of children's feelings and thoughts:

- Draw/write a book together
- Have the children write journals with pictures
- Do a mural as a group which you can display prominently in the classroom
- Allow the children to use computer graphics programs to make pictures
- Make a collage on a specific disaster related topic using photos, magazine pictures, articles, fabric pieces, etc.
- Use one of the coloring books listed in the Annotated Bibliography to guide children's artwork. This may be helpful for those children who do not want to do free drawing.
- Look at other pictures that people have made and talk about what they communicate

Specific types of drawings that you could ask children to make:

- Draw how they are stronger or smarter because of the things that happened to them since the disaster.
- Draw how they are more prepared should they ever be in a disaster again.
- Draw a picture of themselves prepared and ready for another disaster.
- Draw themselves before and after the disaster.
- At the 1 year anniversary of the disaster, ask children to make a collage of the things they lost since the disaster and the things they gained since the disaster.

After the children are finished creating their artwork, it is important to promote a discussion about the pictures. Keep in mind that drawings can give you clues as to what the child is thinking or feeling inside. However, be careful not to overinterpret the meaning of any one drawing.

APPENDIX

References and Additional Readings

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