



Tips for Tots



Tip: Special Topic

Supporting Preschoolers in the Aftermath of Sandy

Strategies

Did you know?

Preschool:

The aftermath of a major storm such as Sandy can profoundly impact young children and leave them feeling scared, upset and insecure. It is normal for children to react to an event like a hurricane and to interpret it as a personal threat. A child's reaction will vary depending on several factors, i.e. the degree and type of exposure, age/development, previous experiences with any perceived/real threats, etc. Reactions can include behaviors such as withdrawal, tantrums, crying, and clinginess, changes in sleep or appetite, and regression.

Major disruptions often occur not only within their homes and families, but also with their childcare settings, caregivers and peer groups. As a result the things that keep children feeling safe, such as, routines, familiarity, and emotional availability of caregivers, are compromised. How families and caregivers react to traumatic events and their response to the needs of children in their care will directly impact a child's social emotional wellbeing. While resources are likely to be very limited, it is essential to respond during the storm's aftermath in ways that help children feel safe and by doing so, minimize any further distress.

Preschool:

- If relocating children in your center to a new space is necessary, consider bringing or making familiar classroom items such as, picture schedules, favorite toys, items from their cozy area. Also consider putting together a "Comfort Box" of comfort objects to support the classrooms transition.
- If it is not possible to keep the classroom children and teaching staff together, let children know where their teachers /friends are, so they know they are safe. An absent teacher may leave a message/letter for the class. Plan to familiarize children with any new staff; do this in the presence of a familiar adult or caregiver.
- In the best way possible, follow the same routines. Knowing what will happen next gives children a feeling of security and a sense that things can move towards what is normal. Use picture schedules and familiar items to help smooth transitions.
- Engage children in activities that will give them the needed distraction from the stressful events around them.
- It is important for staff to take care of their own stress, so they can be a calm & soothing presence for the children in their class, as well as for parents in need. See "Teacher Stress Kit" for ideas.
- Avoid adult-to-adult conversation about the storm or media such as TV, radio, or computer. Children often interpret this to mean that the event is not yet over or is happening again.
- Children may have a need to talk about the event. Monitor these conversations and answer any questions giving brief answers that are factual and reassure children they are safe.
- Help children with any strong feelings or nervous energy they have. Name/talk about feelings & provide gross motor activities or stretching to help children regulate their bodies and feelings.
- It is not unusual for a child to regress in areas where they used to be independent. Give children the support they are looking for and focus their abilities.
- For challenging behaviors, use positive guidance strategies to redirect the behaviors, remind children of the rules and choices, and maintain emotional and physical connection with each child.
- Children can be triggered by things that make them feel as though they are experiencing the event all over again. Briefly talk about the difference between **events** and **reminders**. Try to avoid known triggers for the child. Reassure the child he is safe.

Resources:

- Save the Children <http://www.savethechildren.org>
- FEMA <http://www.fema.gov/kids/teacher.htm>
- Sesame Street <http://www.sesamestreet.org/parents/topicsandactivities/toolkits/ready>

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To learn of the consultant in your area please call: ECCP at (860) 704-6378

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