

Natural Disasters

Natural disasters can be especially traumatic for children and youth. Experiencing a dangerous or violent flood, storm, wildfire, or earthquake is frightening even for adults, and the devastation to the familiar environment (i.e., home and community) can be long lasting and distressing. Often an entire community is impacted, further undermining a child's sense of security and normalcy. These factors present a variety of unique issues and coping challenges, including issues associated with specific types of natural disasters, the need to relocate when home and/or community have been destroyed, the role of the family in lessening or exacerbating the trauma, emotional reactions, and coping techniques.

Children look to the significant adults in their lives for guidance on how to manage their reactions after the immediate threat is over. Schools can help play an important role in this process by providing a stable, familiar environment. Through the support of caring adults school personnel can help children return to normal activities and routines (to the extent possible), and provide an opportunity to transform a frightening event into a learning experience.

Immediate response efforts should emphasize teaching effective coping strategies, fostering supportive relationships, and helping children understand the disaster event. Collaboration between the school crisis response team and an assortment of community, state, and federal organizations and agencies is necessary to respond to the many needs of children, families, and communities following a natural disaster. Healing in the aftermath of a natural disaster takes time; however, advanced preparation and immediate response will facilitate subsequent coping and healing.

http://www.nasponline.org/resources/crisis_safety/naturaldisaster_teams_ho.aspx