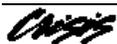


Tips for Parents

There are many things that you might try to help your children feel calm and begin to settle in. Here are several things to think about:

- **Children respond differently.** Some children will be able to handle the changes more easily than others. Even though it is sometimes difficult, try to be patient.
- Children **often act younger** than they are for awhile. When they have been so frightened, they need extra reassurance. Even though you've told them lots of times, keep telling them that you won't leave them -- that you'll stay close.
- Sometimes children **need to talk** about what happened over and over, and some children don't want to talk about it at all. Even though you've heard it all before, let your children talk about it as much as they want to.
- It isn't unusual for children to have **difficulty with sleep** after being so frightened. So far, you'll have been sleeping close together in the shelters. Once you have housing that provides you more space, your children may still need to sleep in the same room with you for awhile. You might move them slowly toward their own rooms. Let them have night lights or leave on soft music, or other things they want to help feel safer.
- Everyone who goes through such terrifying events feels a **loss of sense of control**. **Giving your children choices** when you can helps kids feel a little bit more control.
- Sometimes when children have survived something so big, we need to be a little bit **flexible in our expectations** of them. But that doesn't mean that we should let go of discipline. Their world has been so out-of-control that it is actually a comfort for them to have limits. Discipline is important. It gives them something to bump up against. It actually doesn't feel safe for kids when nobody disciplines them, because it is just one more way that life is out of control. Try discipline with a gentle touch. Maybe extra words of kindness, but still holding firm when they really cross the line.
- Once kids are returning to school, it might be **difficult for them and for you to be separated**. Sometimes it is more difficult for the kids, and sometimes for the parents. Talk about going back to school ahead of time. Kids might be reluctant to go because it is a new school and they won't have any of their old friends. **Reassure them** that people in their new schools want to make them feel welcome and comfortable, so encourage them to tell their teachers what would help.
- You may want to be able to stay with your children in their classrooms when they return to school, but having parents in the room really changes whether kids will pay attention to the teacher. One great thing about school is that it is a normal part of life. It is one more sign that we will get through this. Talk with your child about the good things that



school provides. They will learn things that will help make life better. We learn new ideas and problem solving. **Help your child look forward to returning to school.**

- **Establishing routine is helpful.** What did you used to do before bedtime? Having a bedtime ritual that gives you some quiet time together is helpful. You might read stories together, talk about things that are going OK, have time to talk about anything that you can look forward to, that sort of thing. Have the last 30 minutes before bed time be quiet and calm as much as possible.
- Children do as well as their parents do. That means that it is really important for you to do good things for yourself as well -- to **take good care of yourself** in the ways you can.
- **Help children make plans** and think of things they want to do. This brings a sense of hope, and it is often more helpful to focus on what you can do than it is to think too much about how you feel for awhile. Doing things helps us feel a sense of control.
- Help your children name **ways that people cope**, and things that people can do to help themselves when they feel anxious or are having difficulty sleeping. Let them come up with their own ideas, and then add some of your own.
- **Children need lots of breaks** from the sadness and difficulty. It is great that often they can run outside and play and not seem to be upset at all, and then later they are dissolving in tears. Some of them will go back and forth with that. The schools will be organizing special care and counseling for those children that will help. If you are concerned about your children's adjustment, mood, sleeping problems, anxiety, or if you are just worried about how they're doing, let the school counselors know.
- Figure out ways to help your children form new friendships. Having others to play with or hang out with will be very helpful.
- Sometimes when kids have gone through frightening times, they respond by being **aggressive, angry, or acting out**. If your children are angry or acting out now and that is unusual for them, it is helpful to be understanding, but they also need help getting better. Tell them what you see. "You are angry with your sister and with me, and you weren't like that before. I think it might be because of how scared we all were." Ask them what would help -- what you can do. If your child continues to be aggressive or angry over the next month, be sure to talk with the school counselor. It isn't unusual for this to be a problem for awhile, but you don't want it to become a habit.
- It is common after an event like this for any of us to have really **big reactions to anything that reminds us of the storm** -- a hard rain, a strong gust of wind -- and it is helpful for children to know ahead of time that these "flashbacks" are not unusual. But having a flashback or high level of fear doesn't mean they are actually in danger. Even though it feels dangerous, it really isn't. Help them think about how they might cope with that when it happens. Let the school counselor know.

