

WEST VIRGINIA
EARLY CHILDHOOD
PROVIDER
QUARTERLY



**The Effects of Disasters
on Children**

**Disaster Preparedness and the Social
Emotional Impact on Young Children**

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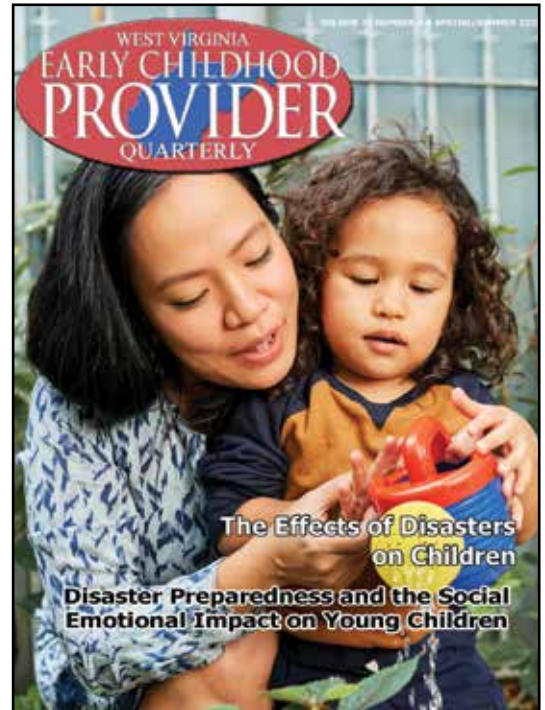
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Disaster Preparedness and the Social Emotional Impact on Young Children	3-4
From a Parent's Perspective: Look for the Helpers!	6-7
From a Director's Perspective: Look for the Helpers!	8
Be Ready to Get Up and Go	9-10
Are You Prepared to Care for Children with Special Health Care Needs Should Disaster Occur	11-12
The Effects of Disasters on Children	14-15
Emergency Preparedness: Helping Children Cope	17-18
Helping Support Children's Social and Emotional Development Through an Emergency	19-22
Parent Blocks Newsletter	25-28

Disaster Preparedness and the Social Emotional Impact on Young Children

Submitted by Kristi George, Special Projects and Information, Coordinator, West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources' Center for Threat Preparedness



Disasters can occur for anyone at any time. There may be advance knowledge of such a possibility, or there may be no warning. Planning and awareness of current events may result in a better outcome during and after a disaster.

Preparing for disasters is helpful not just for ourselves, but also to others, and particularly for those with access and functional needs such as children, senior citizens, people with disabilities, and those with transportation or language barriers. Left to

their own devices, children in particular (depending on their age and development) often have more difficulty escaping dangerous situations. They also require reliable adults to meet essential needs, regardless of whether there is an emergency.

Taking steps now not only improves outcomes, but also boosts confidence in cases of disaster. Because advance preparation is key, making a plan - knowing what to do when a crisis hits - is part of preparedness. A good example is communication:

If the power and phones are out of service, do you know how you will reach and rejoin family members should you become separated? Having an already established reunion location can take the panic or guesswork out of that situation.

It's important to have a three-day supply of food, water, and other items on-hand, especially if help is not available right away. Gathering important items to help get through a crisis beforehand is much preferred over being without during an emer-

gency. Involving children and youth in building an emergency preparedness kit can be a fun activity. Treating it as a challenge or an adventure can make a difference in perspective and confidence, especially from the standpoint of a child.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has some excellent tools to assist in making a plan and building a kit: www.ready.gov/kids/family-emergency-planning. FEMA also has an entire section related to helping children of all ages to get ready: www.ready.gov/kids.

In the aftermath of a crisis or disaster, encourage children to ask questions and answer truthfully while choosing words appropriate for their age and understanding. Limit a child's exposure to any media related to the disaster. Realize that children are vulnerable, and some more than others. Provide them with a realistic sense of hope and be present by spending quality time with them. Try to resume a normal routine as early as possible, which will help to bring a sense of normalcy.

Most children will process and adapt to events quickly while others may

have residual effects from their own experiences or from seeing others experience trauma. Temporary losses may cause stress and permanent losses usually take additional time and care.

Thankfully, there are many tools available for those in need. In addition to reaching out to your child's medical professionals or clergy, you can contact the Disaster Distress Hotline, a service of the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (a branch of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) at 1-800-985-5990.



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IMH competencies® provide a professional development "road map" for acquiring the knowledge and skills needed to attend to the often complex nature of early social and emotional development and parent-child relationships.

Financial assistance is available for Endorsement. Local Child Care Resource and Referral agencies have funds available to provide financial assistance for those seeking Endorsement within the Early Childhood field.

For more information, please contact the West Virginia Infant/Toddler Mental Health Association or visit www.nurturingwvbabies.org

Special thanks to the Wisconsin Alliance for Infant Mental Health for sharing information

From a Parent's Perspective: Look for the Helpers!

Amy Carlson, Ed.D. CCC/SLP

Mother of a preschooler at Enslow Park Presbyterian Preschool,
WV ECPBIS Coordinator at the WV Autism Training Center

“Look for the helpers.” Fred Rogers said that over a decade ago as a way to help comfort preschoolers and make sense of the incomprehensible. Helpers, the people who somehow respond, react, and plan to be there no matter what. When we think of helpers, we often think of police, fire, EMT’s, etc. and these are helpers for sure. But our society is full of other helpers. One of the other helpers I often think of are teachers.

I have been lucky to work in the field of early childhood education in various forms since 2004. I have always had a soft spot for teachers. I was raised by one. I worked with them for years in schools and childcare centers. And on May 6, 2022, I relied on teachers, or helpers, more than usual.

On that day, the rain came down unexpectedly hard. No one had called for the amount of rain that fell that day. Flash flooding soon followed and left parts of Huntington damaged and in need. I have never witnessed flash flooding firsthand before. Within ten minutes of getting a text to pick up our son due to rising waters on Four Pole Creek, his school became surrounded by water. My husband and I (as well as other parents from his school) stood as close to the school as we could get. We parked on Washington Boulevard as close to the preschool as we could get. When we realized we could not reach him that way, we tried Hal Greer Boulevard. We could not get any closer that way. We watched the water rise higher and higher. We saw the school playground engulfed with muddy water. We saw flood water rise and enter homes all around the school. We saw fences, storage buildings, and outdoor furniture wash away. We saw residents abandon their homes with pets in their arms as water rushed in. We saw the parking lot of the school become covered with rising waters that inundated cars. We saw destruction.

What we didn’t see, or feel, was panic. Of course, it was unsettling to literally see the school in view and not being able to do anything to reach our son. We watched rescue boats and large military scale vehicles drive by the school to help people stuck in their homes. And while we were grateful, they were helping those most in need, we were helpless. All those common



helpers, we often take for granted, were heroic that day. But quietly in our little preschool on Enslow Boulevard in Huntington, other heroic acts were taking place.

We wanted to get to our son. As the hours passed, waiting became harder. But we never panicked. Why? Calm begets calm. Because we knew he was with helpers. His school had a second floor and we saw rescue workers all around helping the most needy and vulnerable. But, still it was hours after pick-up and we wanted him with us and we wanted to go home. But we stayed calm because all the teachers in that building stayed calm. His teachers were texting us updates. Telling us to stay put. They immediately called the fire department to let them know they were sheltering in place. They kept in contact with us by texting us updates and pictures of our children playing, eating snacks, generally going about the business of preschoolers.

Calm is more than just appearing calm on the surface. Calm is also having a plan, communicating that plan, preparing for the unexpected, and generally understanding that how we react to something is often more critical than what is happening around us. We found another helper that day. After a few hours we crossed paths with a local man named Joe Browning. Joe was kind enough to load me up in his kayak and pull me over to the school across Washington Boulevard five feet under water. All the while his own home was being destroyed by flash floods. Look for the helpers and thank them when you find one.

I am so grateful for the teachers who work with my son and all the other students in early childhood classrooms across our state. Fred Rogers was right (he usually is). Look for the helpers. And if you are as lucky as I am, get to know them, work with them, support them, and never take them for granted.



From a Director's Perspective: Look for the Helpers!

Submitted by Polly W. Norris, Director, Enslow Park Presbyterian Preschool

On May 6, 2022, our center, Enslow Park Presbyterian Preschool, was forced to shelter-in-place as we experienced the flooding of Four Pole Creek on Enslow Boulevard in Huntington. It had rained hard and fast all morning, and for the safety of everyone we decided to immediately contact parents for early dismissal. However, water was rising very fast and moving swiftly, so parents were unable to reach our center. Police and fire departments had blocked off all entrances to Enslow Boulevard and in less than an hour we were surrounded by water.



This could have been a very traumatic experience for our students at school that day, but it was not. The reason was our amazing and loving staff. They put the needs and safety of our children above their own concerns. Our children were calm because our staff were calm. Our parents remained calm because our staff were calm. Our teachers carried on with daily activities with the children, keeping them engaged.

Our staff remained in constant contact with the parents via text messages and pictures, assuring them that their children were safe, calm, and believe it or not, having fun. The children did not realize it was past time to go home and continued to enjoy playing with their friends.

Yes, we were as a staff concerned. We saw the water rise four to five feet on our parking lot, all our vehicles were completely flooded and destroyed. We did not know how long we would have to remain at school or when rescue workers or parents would be able to reach us. But we all remained calm and were able to make the best of a difficult and unpredictable situation.

Be Ready to Get Up and Go

Submitted by Harmony Vance, River Valley Child Development Services, Child Care Health Educator

Let's be prepared. Fire drills and evacuation drills are common things that are practiced. You gather your children, grab your class roster, and exit the building. But what happens when it is something more than just a drill? What happens if you are displaced for hours? You will need more than just a class roster. When you practice a drill, it is a quick and fast exit and return, but in the case of an emergency you might not return to the building at all. Are you prepared for that? Child Care Aware of America recommends having an emergency supply kit. A premade kit that can see you through from the time you leave the building until each child is back into the care of their parent or guardian.

In case of an emergency, you don't want to frantically be packing up diapers, water, formula, food, and other essentials. Think of the time that would be wasted when getting your children out the door should be the top priority. Instead, you could have a ready-made bag put together that has all these necessities. That way it just adds one thing to grab as you exit the classroom. This could be a kit put together for the whole center or it could be divided up for each classroom.



These are often referred to as classroom Go Bags. Each classroom and center have different needs, so you would want to pack them accordingly to meet those needs. For instance, you would not pack the same things for preschoolers as you would for infants. You would also want to take into consideration the individual needs of your students like emergency medicines or physical disabilities.

When planning out what to include in the bags think of what you would need in an emergency, as well as what you would need to keep your classroom entertained, hydrated,

and fed. Child Care Aware has a premade recommended list that could be used as a guide to start building your own Go Bag. (<https://www.childcareaware.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Emergency-Supply-Kit.pdf>)

Let's be prepared to get out the door as fast as possible with everything needed to take care of the children in our care, and don't forget to practice taking your Go Bag in your next fire drill. It is the hope that an emergency evacuation never needs to happen, but it is better to be prepared and ready just in case.



Emergency Supply Kit

For Child Care Providers

Note: Every child care program is unique. Prep your kit to fit the needs of the children enrolled. You may also pack items that your state requires, or items that are not required, but considered leading practices.

Short-Term Emergency

evacuation
up to
6 hrs.

Pack listed supplies in a backpack, wheeled bin, or wheeled duffle bag.

Long-Term Emergency

sheltering
up to
72 hrs.

Pack listed supplies in a sturdy, water-proof, wheeled tote or garbage can.

Important Papers*

- Care plans
- Medical releases
- Relocation site agreements & maps
- Emergency information on each child in a small notebook or on cards
- Emergency plan & numbers

- All short-term item supplies, except relocation site agreements and maps

Water**

- 1-2 gallons of water for every 4 children/staff

- One gallon per person per day

Food

- Non-perishable food (i.e.: granola bars, crackers, etc.). Consider food allergies of enrolled children.
- Formula or appropriate (pre-labeled) food for infants
- Breast milk stored in small cooler
- Disposable cups, plates, utensils, bowls, including infant bottles

- All short-term supplies PLUS:
- Extra formula or appropriate food for infants
 - Extra non-perishable food
 - Canned fruits and meat
 - Non-electric can opener

Clothing & Bedding

- Emergency blankets
- Pair of work gloves
- Towels

- All short-term supplies PLUS:
- Change of clothes per person, including socks and underwear
 - Extra bedding/blankets
 - 1 emergency blanket per person

* Store in a resealable plastic bag or a waterproof container.

**Water may not fit into a backpack. Store in an easy-to-carry method (roller bag/crate with wheels, etc).

Are You Prepared to Care For Children with Special Health Care Needs Should a Disaster Occur?

Submitted by Lisa Galford, MSN, RN, Child Care Nurse Health Consultant

Have you ever made a grocery list, gotten to the store and realized you forgot the list? If you are saying, “Yes”, I am right there with you. It can be highly frustrating trying to remember everything you need from memory, and then even more frustrating to get home and realize you really need something you forgot. This generally causes no more than an inconvenience, but should a disaster occur in your child care center, ask yourself this question: “Do I have everything I need?”

Having a disaster plan is not only fulfilling the mandatory requirement for having children in your care, but should also include a plan of how you are going to care for children with special health care needs. You may need extra insulin for a child with diabetes, a child with asthma might need a nebulizer treatment, and perhaps a child in your care generally takes a daily maintenance medication for seizures before arriving in the morning. Should the child have to spend the night if you are sheltering in place, do you have medication to give them the next morning? You should never be left unprepared in a situation like any of these. Prepare means to be ready before a disaster happens.

It is important to know the requirements for childcare centers in WV with regards to emergency and disaster planning, §78-1-19. Safety and Emergency Operating Procedures (dhhr.wv.gov). In addition to these requirements, ensure that you have everything you could possibly need for children with special health care needs such as:

- A Medical Action Plan for the child’s medical condition
- Phone numbers and emergency contact details
- Emergency medications
- Medical equipment or a backup power source to run them

Along with developing policies that your center will follow, the staff need to be informed and trained on what to do (dhhr.wv.gov). Talk about these things often with your staff. Have them come up with different scenarios and then discuss what you would do in a particular situation. Perhaps you would need to evacuate the building in the dead of winter. What is your plan?

Food and water are a life sustaining essential. Make sure you have a supply of emergency food. Keep dry or packaged food in a cool, dry place. Check the expiration date twice a year. Water will need replaced twice a year to ensure you are keeping a fresh supply (cdc.gov).

You will never see a calendar marked with an upcoming disaster. You never know when or how a disaster may occur. A disaster could leave children in your care for extra hours, days, or possibly longer. Children with special health care needs could be at risk if you are not prepared. Plan and prepare to ensure the children in your care are safe, and that their physical and medical needs are met during a disaster.

References:

<https://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/checklists/special-health-care-needs.html>

<https://dhhr.wv.gov/bcf/Childcare/Documents/ChildCareCenterRegulationWeb.pdf>





WEST VIRGINIA EARLY CHILDHOOD

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The Effects of Disasters on Children

Submitted by Carissa Wetz, Capstone Student, Marshall University

There are many disasters that can happen throughout a person's life such as floods, fires, tornadoes, a family death, or a pandemic. Each of these disasters are going to affect a person differently. This is especially true when it comes to children. They have different abilities than adults, so they will have different effects and need more help coping afterward. In this paper, learn about the differences between children and adults, the effects that disasters can have on children, and ways to help them cope.

Children and adults will experience disasters differently from each other. Depending on the child's age, they could have little to no understanding about what is going on. Even if you have talked to them before about the disaster, when it actually happens it will be hard for the children to understand. Because children are younger, they have had less experiences in life, and they will have less knowledge of safety procedures needed during the disaster. They are going to need help from the adults around them. It's important to note that children also have smaller bodies, so they are a lot more likely to be physically injured (CDC, 2020).



When a disaster happens, it has lasting mental and physical effects on a person. There are many different mental health disorders and symptoms that can be caused by a disaster. Some of the symptoms that can occur are fear, sadness, disruptions in sleep, or anger outbursts. They could also start having difficulty in school and focusing on tasks. If they are older, they may start engaging in aggressive or dangerous activities (SAMHSA, 2022). Adults in the child's life need to watch out for these symptoms and make sure they are offering help when they notice

them. If they progress for a while or impact the child's day-to-day life, then the child needs to see a professional for help. This is when it could be a mental disorder such as anxiety, depression, or PTSD. Professionals will be able to help with these disorders and provide techniques for handling them.

There are many ways that adults in a child's life can help them cope with the disaster. Children thrive on a consistent routine and feeling like they have some control over their day (SAMHSA, 2022). It will be ben-

eficial to the child if they get back to a semi-normal routine as soon as possible and have some choices throughout their day. The choices could be as simple as letting them choose between two items for lunch or picking what they get to wear for the day. This lets them feel like they have some control over how their day is going. Another way to help them is making sure they have chances to discuss what happened and talk about how they feel (SAMHSA, 2022). If the child isn't old enough to talk, they can draw or color to help express how they are feeling about what is going on. When you are discussing what happened, make sure it is age appropriate to explain to the child you are talking too. It is important though to not expose them to a lot of media coverage of the event that happened because it could cause unneeded stress on the child. It helps the child if they see the adults in their life taking care of themselves, so they know what they need to do for themselves. If more help is needed for the child, make sure to go see a mental health professional. When all the adults in the child's life work together, it will help the child have the most success in dealing with the disaster.

To reiterate, children are very different from adults in a lot of ways. They are going to experience and deal with the disaster differently

than the adults around them. They will need help from everyone in their life during and after the disaster. They will need help understanding what happened and coping with all their big feelings. It is important to be educated on the signs and symptoms that children could show after a disaster.

Sources:

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2020, September 1). How are children different from adults? Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Retrieved April 4, 2023, from <https://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/differences.html>

Children and disasters. SAMHSA. (2022, March 1). Retrieved April 4, 2023, from <https://www.samhsa.gov/dtac/disaster-survivors/children-and-disaster>





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West Virginia

Emergency Preparedness: Helping Children Cope

Submitted by Lena Graham, Early Childhood Specialist

Disaster can strike at any given time. We try to be prepared, but we often think that it will never happen to us. Sometimes disasters can come with a warning, but sometimes they come unexpectedly. When you care for children, it is best to be prepared for when disaster strikes.

Being ready for a disaster can supply a sense of relief. Planning where to evacuate during a disaster is the first step in being prepared. Plans should include where and how you are going to evacuate the building, and how you will notify and reunify

parents or caregivers of the children you care for. Staff members can be assigned certain jobs to aid with the notifications and reunification process. If you serve children with special needs, you will also need to have a plan on how to care for those children during a disaster.

Once your plan is in place, practicing your plan is the next step. Practice evacuation drills, shelter in place drills, and lock down drills. Repeating these drills multiple times and at various times of the day allows you, your staff, and the children to feel

more prepared for when the actual event occurs.

Along with forming and practicing your plan, you should have supplies on hand. One way to keep your supplies ready is by having book bags with the supplies in them. Evacuation bags should be equipped with flashlights, extra batteries, a battery-powered or crank powered radio, blankets, nonperishable food, kid friendly snacks, first aid kits, water, a whistle, towelettes, and toilet paper. It is recommended to have one gallon of water per person per day, and to have at least three days' worth of food per person. You should also have a list of children's allergies or medicines. It is suggested to add some toys or comfort items for children. These items could be books, crayons, paper, and stuffed animals. Once your kits are put together, they will need to be continuously checked on and updated. Savethechildren.org has handouts available for what should be included in these kits.

Even though childcare environments typically already have the components of an evacuation bag, it is still important to highlight the fact that prepared evacuation bags



offer a more swift, controlled evacuation. When early childhood caregivers take the time to assemble an evacuation bag, they are eliminating the amount of time it would otherwise take to gather up those essential items and evacuate the building. If a disaster were to strike and require immediate evacuation, caregivers would be able to grab their evacuation bags in a timely manner.

If you have ever experienced a disaster, then you know it is traumatizing. You feel helpless, scared, and anxious and it is usually a memory that never goes away. As adults, we can usually comprehend what is happening. For children, they look to us for guidance during these situations. How we react will let the children know how to react. We need to try to stay calm and use a calming tone when directing the children on what to do.

According to the CDC, children under the age of 8 are more susceptible to developing a mental health issue after a disaster. After a disaster, children may experience anxiety, sadness, sleep disturbances, painful dreams, irritability, difficulty concentrating, or angry outbursts. Children are at greater risk of mental stress from a disaster because they cannot comprehend the situation. They feel less control during the event and lack the experience for coping with demanding situations. Disasters can

cause more stress for children who already have a history of trauma or an emotional, mental, developmental, or behavioral disorder.

As parents and early childhood educators, we want to help children cope through disasters. Early childhood educators can support children who have experienced disasters by allowing children to talk about what they experienced, ask questions about what happened, and share their concerns. It is essential to allow children to be with a caregiver who can help them feel secure, connected, and feel a sense of hope.

It is easy for us to get wrapped up in the media coverage after a disaster occurs, but we need to make sure that we are not exposing children to the media covering the disaster. This can be traumatic for children who had a firsthand experience in the disaster. Early childhood educators should collaborate with coworkers as well as parents/guardians to discuss how children are coping with the disaster aftermath.

As passionate caregivers, it is our immediate response to worry about the well-being of our children. However, after a disaster there may be feelings of anger or depression as a caregiver. Anger is linked to heart disease, high blood pressure, sleep disturbances, and headaches. Long term anger can lead to anxi-

ety and depression. If you feel these emotions, finding a support group can help overcome these emotions. Practicing relaxation tips such as deep breathing or yoga can also help reduce anger or anxiety.

In conclusion, being prepared for a disaster can not only save lives, but also prepare us for the emotional turmoil that disasters can bring for both adults and children. There are steps to ensure that you are ready for disaster. These steps consist of making an emergency plan, practicing the plan, and having an emergency kit with the essentials.

For more information on emergency preparedness, please contact your local resource and referral agency.

References:

<https://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/features/disasters-mental-health.html#:~:text=After%20a%20disaster%2C%20children%20may,can%20cause%20stress%20for%20families>

<https://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/before-during-after.html>

Helping Support Children's Social and Emotional Development Through an Emergency

Submitted by Chrissy Pownell, M.S., IMH-E®, Behavioral Consultant, Choices Child Care Resource and Referral

No one wants to think that an emergency will occur, especially in the presence of children. The reality however is that an emergency may occur at any moment. As early childhood education professionals there are many emergency situations that can arise while you are caring for children. That's why it's essential to be prepared. This article will provide some information about what to do before, during, and after an emergency to help support the children in your care.

Before an Emergency

One of the most important things to do to help children before an emergency occurs is to build positive relationships. Building positive relationships with children and their families will help them to feel safe and secure when they are with you. To help build these strong positive relationships with children you need to be responsive to the child's needs. Build positive, responsive relationships by getting to know the children and their families. Spend time with them and learn their likes, dislikes, and ways of communicating. By being responsive you will

create bonds and become a 'safe place' for them. They will trust you to do your best to keep them safe.

Another important thing to do before an emergency occurs is to be prepared. Being prepared helps everyone know what to do. Preparation helps everyone be less afraid and decreases the likelihood of distress. Practicing emergency drills is one of the best ways to be prepared for an emergency. This practice will help to make information stick for you and the children. Children are empowered by knowing the order of events and how to carry them out.

During emergency drills children will get to practice what to do. Assigning roles for each child, pre-school age and up, will help provide comfort and security to children by empowering them with skills and knowledge (Greenman, 2022). Praise children for following directions during the drill. Let children know that practicing emergency drills doesn't mean something bad will happen, but that completing emergency drills will help everyone learn what to do and how to be safe

if something does happen (WVIT-MHA, 2023). It's important to keep in mind that emergency drills can be frightening for young children who are still learning the difference between fantasy and reality (WVIT-MHA, 2023). Therefore, make sure to conduct emergency drills in a developmentally appropriate way. Young children will be less scared and more willing to practice emergency drills regularly if you try making it a game (McCarthy, 2021).

Social stories are a great tool that can be utilized to help children know what to do in case of an emergency. If you would like to print some social stories to read with the children, visit <https://www.childhoodpreparedness.org/resources> and click on the tab labeled "Social Stories". This site has free social stories that you can access about fire drills, active shooter preparedness drills, tornado drills, hurricanes, and wildfires. If you find a social story that you'd like to use but don't have capabilities to print it, contact your local Child Care Resource and Referral Agency, and they will be happy to help.

During an Emergency

You've prepared and practiced. Now, it's time to take action! During an emergency, you must take care of yourself before you are able to take care of others. When an emergency occurs, it's important for YOU to stay calm. Your ability to remain calm, take control, and be supportive will help support children's mental health during emergencies. Infants and young children are sensitive to the anxiety and worry of adults. Their responses to emergencies are largely determined by watching the responses and reactions of adults around them (WVITMHA, 2023). You need to "be strong in a crisis even when feeling sad, scared, confused, or angry because the children need to draw upon your strength, not take care of you" (Greenman, 2022). Children take cues from those around them. They will pick up on adults and others' emotions. They will feed off of your energy, observing not only what you say but also what you do (Greenman, 2022).

Pay attention to your tone of voice. Make sure your tone conveys the seriousness of the situation, but that it is also calm. Listen and watch children for understanding. Make sure to give clear directions to children about what they need to do. Use simple and developmentally

appropriate language to provide information about what is happening and what you are doing.

Children will respond in different ways during an emergency. Some children may display excessive activity, while some children may be non-compliant and refuse to move. These are typical responses to fear. Some children may act silly and laugh. This is a way to discharge energy when scared. Some children may appear to be undisturbed about the situation. It's just as important to check in with these children because they are likely still scared and may be having internal physical responses to their fear. Please remember "No matter if children are displaying scared reactions or not, every child will need support and reassurance during emergencies" (WVITMHA, 2023).

During an emergency make sure to adapt your responses according to a child's needs and developmental level. Do your best to help keep children calm. You can help children stay calm by practicing mindful breathing, being responsive to each child's needs, providing extra physical and emotional affection, and my providing extra comfort, support, and reassurance. If it's safe, sing songs, tell stories, and provide physical comfort. For infants, you could hold them close, sing softly to them, and utilize

white noise to drown out any scary sounds. For preschool aged children, reassure them that you are going to do your best to keep them safe by giving them brief, simple explanations emphasizing what you are doing (Greenman, 2022). Be honest and answer children's questions that match their developmental level.

After an Emergency

The type of response children have following an emergency is dependent on multiple factors. Characteristics of what happened during the event will have a huge effect on how a child responds. A child's temperament, developmental abilities, and their personality will also affect how they respond following an emergency. Some children may easily adapt to new and unfamiliar situations, while other children do not. A child's family, positive relationships, and their community all impact the child's responses. What is important to remember is that each child is unique and will respond in their own ways.

Following an emergency, children may experience behaviors that are not typical for them. "Very young infants under one-year show distress through their bodies, for example, by startling easily or holding their bodies in a rigid, stiff way" (WVITMHA, 2023). They may

have prolonged and intense crying. They may be non-responsive to soothing or reject being held. They may develop feeding, sleeping, or elimination problems (WVITMHA, 2023).

Young children may regress in their development. An example of regression may be a child that was potty trained now is wetting the bed. Young children may have increased anxiety and fear of strangers. They may also have difficulty going to sleep or staying asleep. They may become aggressive or withdrawn. Some children may act out and have more temper tantrums (WVITMHA, 2023).

Some children may become depressed, be more fearful or anxious. They may develop physical symptoms such as a stomachache or a headache. Some children may not be able to communicate what they are feeling or what they need. They may act immature or become less patient. Children may develop sleep problems such as night terrors. Some children may become more clingy. Some children will develop separation anxiety and be afraid that the disaster may happen again. Some children may not eat, or eat more than they normally do.

Older children may be angry, act out, fight with others, act like they have no feelings, disobey, or use

substances to self-soothe. Then there are some children that may hide their feeling of distress.

Thankfully, there are ways that you as the child's caregiver can help. Stay in tune with the children in your care. Make sure that you verbalize sympathy and be responsive to the child's cues. This will help you know how to meet a child's needs. It's important to help children identify and label their feelings. Make sure to validate every child's feelings, allow them the time and space to regulate their emotions. Ask children how you can help them to feel safe.

You can also help children by teaching mindfulness activities such as deep breathing to help children become calm. Give children supports that they may need, allow them to have security and comfort items such as a 'blanky' or a stuffed animal. Maintain consistency in routines and with caregivers. Restore their normal routine as much as possible. This will help children get back to some type of normalcy, and will support the children in feeling more safe and secure.

Here are some additional recommendations from the West Virginia Infant/Toddler Mental Health Association to help support infants and young children following a disaster:

- Notice what calms each infant and helps regulate their bodies and emotions.
- Maintain routines and consistent care as much as possible.
- Use gentle touch and a soothing tone of voice.
- When an infant is scared or upset, make sure they are with a familiar caregiver.
- Focus on age-appropriate activities, play, and learning.
- Provide extra affection and attention.
- Return to routines and normalcy as appropriate.
- Play.

The West Virginia Infant Toddler Mental Health Association (WVITMHA) has developed an emergency toolkit titled "West Virginia Preparedness for Emergency Response Toolkit: A Social Emotional Relational Approach". This toolkit is a valuable resource that lists many ways to help support infants, young children, families, and caregivers through an emergency.

"The feelings of powerlessness and helplessness shared both by children and adults after a crisis are

alleviated through action” (Greenman, 2022). Our sense of power is restored when we take steps to improve our current situation. Honor a child’s need to have some power and control over their life by finding ways for them to contribute. Younger children can draw thank you cards or pictures for those that helped during the emergency. Older children can help collect donations for those that may need it.

Following an emergency, it’s important to limit a child’s exposure to media coverage of the event. The American Academy of Pediatrics encourages those who work closely with children to filter information about the event and present it in a way that children can understand, adjust to, and handle in a healthy way (Schonfeld, 2022). Instead of exposing children to the media, share basic information with children without being too vague, while avoiding graphic details and images. Provide a simple explanation and let them know how it will affect them. Share with children what is being done to help keep them safe. Ask if they have any questions and answer those questions as best as you can according to their development.

Conclusion

In conclusion, everyone will respond to emergencies differently. How you are prepared before an

emergency occurs, and how you comfort and support children during and after an emergency, will have a huge effect on their responses and recovery following the event. One of the most important things you can do is have a responsive and connected relationship with the children so that you can respond to their needs in appropriate ways.

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West Virginia Infant/Toddler
Mental Health Association

Supporting the social and emotional well-being of children



A NEW RESOURCE... WV PREPAREDNESS FOR EMERGENCY RESPONSE TOOLKIT

A Social-Emotional Relational Approach

What is this new resource?

This comprehensive toolkit offers a framework in thinking through emergency preparedness plans in a developmentally appropriate and trauma informed manner to further the social emotional development of infants and young children.

What is covered?

This toolkit is divided into three sections: emergency preparedness, emergency response, and emergency recovery. Each section focuses on the social and emotional needs of infants, young children, and their families. Resources by disaster type are provided at the end of the toolkit.

Key considerations for emotional regulation during emergency situations

- Both children and adults experience intense feelings such as fear or helplessness during emergencies.
- Children and adults who have been exposed to adverse experiences early in their lives might have increased difficulty managing and coping after an emergency.
- All children, because of their developmental immaturity, will require extra support with emotional regulation during times of stress.



Access the full
document here



THE WEST VIRGINIA INFANT/TODDLER MENTAL HEALTH ASSOCIATION

nurturingwvbabies.org

Do you know a child who is not *moving *hearing *seeing * learning or *talking like others their age?

By 3 months,
Does your baby...

- grasp rattle or finger?
- hold up his/her head well?
- make cooing sounds?
- smile when talked to?

By 6 months,
Does your baby...

- play with own hands/feet?
- roll over?
- turn his/her head towards sound?
- holds head up/looks around without support?

By 9 months,
Does your baby...

- sit alone or with minimal support?
- pick up small objects with thumb and fingers?
- move toy from hand to hand?

By 12 months,
Does your baby...

- wave goodbye?
- play with toys in different ways?
- feed self with finger foods?
- begin to pull up and stand?
- begin to take steps?

By 18 months,
Does your baby...

- cling to caretaker in new situations?
- try to talk and repeat words?
- walk without support?

By 24 months,
Does your baby...

- point to body parts?
- walk, run, climb without help?
- get along with other children?
- use 2 or 3 word sentences?

If you are concerned about your child's development, get help early.

Every child deserves a great start.

WV Birth to Three supports families to help their children grow and learn.

To learn more about the
WV Birth to Three services
in your area, please call:

1-866-321-4728

Or visit www.wvdhhr.org/birth23



WV Birth to Three services and supports are provided under Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and administered through the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, Office of Maternal, Child and Family Health.



Parent Blocks

NEWSLETTER



“Providing resources to parents throughout West Virginia”

Volume 19, Issue 2, Spring/Summer 2023

What to expect from children during emergencies

There is no single way that adults or children will respond to a crisis. A child’s response will depend on their temperament, their previous experiences, and the responses of the adults around them. As always, children will demonstrate their needs through behavior, and, as caregivers, it is important to understand the meaning of this behavior. However, during a crisis, when adults’ emotions are strongly activated, slowing down to consider a child’s needs can be difficult. A

caregiver can easily determine how to respond to a child who appears frightened or indicates a wish to be held, but some behaviors are more difficult to interpret.

All children are different, and behavior has different meanings depending on the situation and the child. It is important to remember that children do not choose to engage in challenging behaviors. During emergencies, behavior is often a reflexive response to danger. For children who have previous exposure to trauma, behavior may be based on how their brains and bodies have learned to respond to difficult situations. Some children with flexible temperaments may have minimal responses to emergencies. It is important not to overlook these children as all children have a need for support, communication, and reassurance. It is also helpful to remember that children are unlikely to respond in the same ways as adults.

WV Parent Blocks Newsletter is a project of West Virginia Early Childhood Training Connections and Resources, a collaborative project of West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources/Bureau for Children and Families/Division of Early Care and Education; WV Head Start State Collaboration Office; Office of Maternal, Child and Family Health/West Virginia Birth to Three; and West Virginia Home Visitation Program and is supported and administered by River Valley Child Development Services.

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Young Children and Disasters

Reprinted from the West Virginia Preparedness for Emergency Toolkit: A Social Emotional Relational Approach

Even before young children fully understand what is going on around them, they are strongly impacted by what happens in their environments. Young children's bodies and brains react to stressful events, and chronic stress can impact their physical development as well as their ability to feel safe and relate to others.

A safe, stable, and supportive relationship with a caregiving adult helps children during disaster and is a key factor contributing to their post- disaster recovery.

Following disaster, look for the following signs of stress in young children:

- Often showing a sad or frightened facial expression
- Difficulty soothing when upset, even with adult support
- Having new fears that cannot be resolved
- Being more clingy or needy
- Being withdrawn or avoiding interactions
- Being sensitive to loud noises, jumpy, or anxious
- Having outbursts of anger and aggression
- Reporting physical complaints (stomach aches, headaches, change in appetite)
- Difficulty sleeping
- Regressing in developmental milestones
- Having difficulty concentrating or seeming spaced or zoned out
- Repeated playing or talking about the event

Tips for supporting infants following a disaster:

- Provide extra affection and attention
- Return to routines and normalcy as appropriate
- Let children know you are there to keep them safe
- Listen to and watch the children to learn what they understand about the situation
- Offer soothing activities like singing, coloring, or listening to music
- Encourage physical play and activities so children can release anxious energy
- Teach age-appropriate relaxation skills like counting our belly breathing
- Offer play activities and art materials to allow children to express their thoughts and feelings
- Use simple and developmentally appropriate language to provide basic but accurate information about what happened
- Limit media coverage about the disaster
- Refer for infant and early childhood mental health services if needed

Preparedness Essentials

Preparedness Checklist

Disasters disrupt our lives. Some disasters, like floods and home fires, can occur anywhere. Other disasters, like wildfires and hurricanes, are more common in certain areas. Climate change is causing more frequent and extreme weather events. This increases our risk of death, injury, property loss and disruption. But we can take action to prepare. Prepare now to protect yourself, your loved ones and your home.



Be Prepared

Being prepared means that you:

- Know what hazards, like tornadoes or floods, are likely to happen in your community.
- Have plans in place so that you and your loved ones know how to respond.
- Have a way to monitor emergency conditions in your area.
- Have emergency skills, such as CPR and first aid.
- Have emergency supplies, like food, water and medicine, so that you can meet your basic needs.

- Have a battery-powered radio.
- Plan to monitor weather conditions near you.



Learn Emergency Skills

Prepare now so that you have critical skills and can meet your basic needs.

- Learn first aid and CPR.
- Utilities may be offline. Be ready to live without power, gas and water. Plan for your needs, including cell phones and medical equipment. Talk to your doctor. Plan for backup power.



Understand Your Risks

Some hazards, such as floods and home fires, can happen anywhere. Others, including earthquakes and hurricanes, are more common in certain areas.

Reach out to your state or local office of emergency management agency to learn more about your local risks.



Gather Emergency Supplies

Gather food, water and medicine.

Organize supplies into a Go-Kit and a Stay-at-Home Kit.

- Go-Kit: at least three days of supplies that you can carry with you. Include backup batteries and chargers for your devices (cell phone, CPAP, wheelchair, etc.)
- Stay-at-Home Kit: at least two weeks of supplies. Stores and pharmacies might be closed.
- Have a 1-month supply of medication in a child-proof container and medical supplies or equipment.



Plan to Stay Connected

In a disaster, it is important to stay connected and informed.

- Sign up for free emergency alerts from your local government.
- Have a backup battery or a way to charge your cell phone.



Gather Emergency Supplies

- Keep personal, financial and medical records safe and easy to access (hard copies or securely backed up). Consider keeping a list of your medications and dosages on a small card to carry with you.
- Customize your kits to meet your household's needs and the season.

Basic supplies include:

- Water: 1 gallon per person, per day
- Food: non-perishable, easy-to-prepare items
- Can opener
- Medications and medical items
- Flashlight or battery-powered lanterns
- Battery-powered or hand-crank radio (NOAA Weather Radio, if possible)
- Extra batteries
- First aid kit
- Multi-purpose tool
- Sanitation and personal hygiene items
- Cell phone with chargers
- Family and emergency contact information
- Extra cash
- Emergency blanket
- Hats, gloves, boots, coats, etc. (cold weather)
- Sun hats, sunglasses, sunscreen, bug spray, etc. (warm weather)
- Change of clothes
- Map(s) of the area
- Keep personal, financial and medical records safe and easy to access (hard copies or securely backed up).



Make Plans to Stay Safe

Stay or go? Depending on the emergency, you may need to stay where you are or evacuate to stay safe.

If you need to go somewhere else, think through these questions:

- Where will I go?
- How will I get there?
- Where will I stay?
- What will I bring with me?



Plan to Reconnect With Loved Ones

- If separated, or if the phone or internet is down, have a plan to communicate with loved ones.
- Complete a contact card for each member of your household. Ensure that they carry it with them.
- Text is best. A text message may go through when a phone call will not.
- Designate an out-of-town contact who can help your household reconnect. It may be easier to reach people outside the affected area.
- Agree to meet in a specific place to help you reconnect with loved ones when it is safe.
 - If you need to leave your home, choose a specific location nearby.
 - If you need to leave your community, choose a specific location outside your community.



Plan to Take Care of Yourself

- It's normal to have bad feelings, stress or anxiety after a disaster or other emergency.
- Plan to eat healthy food and get enough sleep to help you deal with stress.
- Know that you can contact the Disaster Distress Helpline for free if you need to talk to someone. Call or text **1-800-985-5990**.

Prepare so you can protect. | For more information, visit redcross.org/prepare | Download the Emergency App

