



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

National Headquarters
2025 E St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20006
www.redcross.org

News Release
NEWS RELEASE

Contact: Public Affairs Desk
Telephone: (202) 303-5551
FOR MEDIA ONLY

Tips for Parents: How to Help Your Kids Cope With Disaster

Editor's note: Red Cross spokespeople are located throughout the affected areas. Please call the Disaster Operations Center to facilitate media requests (202-303-5551).

WASHINGTON, March 2, 2007 – Children are especially vulnerable during and after a disaster, mental health experts say. Even if they haven't lost belongs or a loved one, children are susceptible to all the anxiety and uncertainty around them.

"It's up to us grownups to help children get through these stressful situations," said Joscelyn Silsby, who manages preparedness education for the American Red Cross.

Silsby is a mother herself, so this is important to her both personally and professionally.

In the aftermath of a disaster, adults may be too stressed to realize how their emotions are affecting the children in their lives. If you're feeling stressed, Silsby encourages people to follow these Red Cross recommendations:

- Take a few deep breaths to relax.
- Count to 10 before speaking.
- Talk to an adult family member or friend.
- Take a short break. Ask a family member or trusted friend to look after the child while you "regroup."
- Be consistent and positive in your rules for behavior.
- Use patience – never use harsh words.
- Show love and respect.
- Give extra comfort to your family.

Silsby noted children can be affected directly by the stress of a disaster, whether they are involved or they are exposed through conversations or media reports.

Experiences such as being evacuated, seeing others hurt or being hurt themselves, or seeing adults panic can be traumatic. Losing belongings or a loved one or pet – or even losing contact with friends or teachers – can set off a cascade of grief or unexpected behavior.

It's important for parents and other caregivers to understand what is causing a child's anxieties. Silsby said that following a disaster, children are most afraid that:

- The event will happen again.
- Someone close to them will be killed or injured.
- They will be left alone or separated from their family.

Adults can clarify misunderstandings of risk and danger by acknowledging children's concerns. Talking about how the adults and the community are preparing for the future can strengthen a child's sense of safety and security.

Listen to what a child is saying. If a child asks questions, answer with the amount of detail appropriate to the child's age; children vary in the amount of information they need and can understand. If a child has trouble expressing his or her thoughts and feelings, encourage them to draw a picture or tell a story about what's troubling them.

The Red Cross suggests parents and caregivers:

- Encourage the child to talk and listen to their concerns.
- Calmly provide factual information about what happened and plans for ensuring their safety.
- Be sure the child gets plenty of rest.
- Involve the child in updating a family disaster plan and in making a disaster supplies kit.
- Practice the disaster plan.
- Involve the child by giving them specific tasks to let them know they can help restore family and community life.
- Spend extra time with the child.
- Re-establish daily routines for work, school, play and meals.
- Limit exposure to news coverage of the disaster. Especially for young children, repeatedly watching images of an upsetting event can lead them to believe it is happening again and again.

Meanwhile, Silsby said, adults should be realistic about their own coping skills following a disaster. "If you find yourself overwhelmed, don't try to 'go it alone,'" he said. "The Red Cross has people specifically trained to help in these situations."

For information about Red Cross assistance or disaster preparedness, call 1-800-HELP NOW or your local Red Cross chapter.

The American Red Cross helps people prevent, prepare for and respond to emergencies. Last year, almost a million volunteers and 35,000 employees helped victims of almost 75,000 disasters; taught lifesaving skills to millions; and helped U.S. service members separated from their families stay connected. Almost 4 million people gave blood through the Red Cross, the largest supplier of blood and blood products in the United States. The American Red Cross is part of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement. An average of 91 cents of every dollar the Red Cross spends is invested in humanitarian services and programs. The Red Cross is not a government agency; it relies on donations of time, money, and blood to do its work.

– END –