



**American
Red Cross**

Twin Cities Area Chapter

Coping with Disaster - Tips for Children and Adults

As we know from tragedy of the recent tornadoes disasters may strike quickly and without warning. These events can be frightening for adults, but they are traumatic for children if they don't know what to do. During and after a disaster, children may become anxious, confused, or frightened. It is important to give children guidance that will help them reduce their fears.

The Red Cross offers the following advice for talking with your children about this disaster and coping with it yourself.

Coping with Tragedy

No matter what your age, there are a number of things you can do to help cope with disaster.

- **Talk about it.** Let children talk about the disaster and ask questions as much as they want. Encourage children to describe what they're feeling and listen to what they say. Let them know that their feelings are normal and this is an abnormal situation. You can help children cope by understanding what causes their anxieties and fears. A child who feels afraid is afraid. Your words and actions can provide reassurance. When talking with your child, be sure to present a realistic picture that is honest, age-appropriate and manageable. This can help alleviate any post traumatic reaction later on. Your children will realize that life will eventually return to normal. Kids key in on what adults are feeling, so if we lose control - so will they. As adults, sharing your thoughts with friends and loved ones can relieve stress and remind you that others are feeling the same thing.
- **Take care of yourself.** Find a way to get restful sleep. Turn your mind off by taking a long shower, reading or doing whatever you find relaxing. Participate in activities that allow you to focus on something else such as cross-stitching, playing with pets or taking a walk. Eating healthy and sharing meals with others can help children and adults cope with stress. Limit your intake of caffeine and nicotine and get plenty of exercise.
- **Minimize exposure to graphic information.** This is especially important for children and their minds are not as developed as adults and can only process information in small doses. Children's fears also may stem from their imagination, and you should take these feelings seriously. Living near the disaster can also be stressful. Try to make plans to get away if possible, even if it simply means shopping in another area.
- **Follow your routine.** Children depend on daily routines: They wake up, eat breakfast, go to school, and play with friends. When emergencies or disasters interrupt this routine, children may become anxious. Routines help give them and you a sense of control and remind them that life will return to normal.
- **Watch for signs of excess.** Whether it's eating, sleeping, or drinking, too much of anything can be a sign of danger. Sometimes after a disaster people think, "Life is short, so I might as well (fill in the blank)" and they start engaging in risky behavior. Watch for warning signs in yourself in others.

- **Take positive action.** Doing something physical allows children and adults to participate in the healing process. Create a memory box or plan a tree in honor of those lost in the disaster.
- **Get Ready for the next disaster.** Preparing for future emergencies by creating a family disaster plan, building a kit with disaster supplies, taking a first aid and CPR course, giving blood or volunteering not only helps your family regain a sense of control, but helps our community. Resources are available through the Red Cross by calling (612) 871-7676 or online at [redcrossstc.org](https://www.redcrossstc.org).