

Resources are available to help children cope after a disaster

Just as adults are struggling to cope with stress after the severe storms, flooding, landslides, and mudslides this December, children may also be struggling emotionally. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Oregon Emergency Management, (OEM), and the American Red Cross offer valuable services and information to help children recover after a disaster.

"Recovery is a process not a destination," said State Coordinating Officer Abby Kershaw. "People can sometimes feel like they're taking a step backward when the blues hit, but that emotional roller coaster is a natural part of the recovery process."

"FEMA understands that survivors experience many anxieties and emotions after disasters," said FEMA's Federal Coordinating Officer Glen R. Sachtleben. "The recovery process is difficult, and parents can help reassure their children by being prepared for disasters as a family."

Identify Fears and Anxieties

Fear after a disaster is natural, but adults should be aware that children may have experienced trauma or may have worries they are unable to express. How parents and caregivers behave at this time can have lasting effects on their children. If a caregiver resumes a normal existence quickly, the child is more likely to have a quick recovery.



The old modular building behind Washington Grade School being demolished to make room for approximately 3,500 cubic yards of gravel needed to level the area around the old building in preparation for new temporary modular buildings that need to be in place before school can start back up in Vernonia.



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Children may need help if they:

Had direct exposure to the disaster, experienced the evacuation, saw people injured or dying, were in situations in which their own lives were threatened;

Suffered personal loss due to the death of, or serious injury to, a family member, close friend or pet;

Are living in interim housing, or attending a different school;

Experiencing ongoing stress from their current situation;

Are or were living in a shelter, lost contact with their friends, lost things that are important to them, their parents lost their jobs; or

Parents are experiencing severe financial hardship.

How Children May React to Disaster

Children may have worries about things they cannot express clearly. Their reactions may vary widely, depending on age, but there are some common responses to stress.

Birth through six years: Infants and young children may be more irritable, cry more than usual, and need more comfort than before the disaster. Preschool and kindergarten children can feel helpless and frightened about separation from their parents. They may resume thumb sucking or bed-wetting.

Seven through 10: Older children may become preoccupied with the disaster and want to talk about it continually. They may fear the disaster will happen again and may have

strong, angry or sad feelings. Children who act out may be expressing grief and trauma, or a child may behave as if he or she has no feelings. This numbness can be an emotional shield that protects the child from experiencing pain.

Eleven through 18 years: Teenagers may react with risk-taking behaviors, such as reckless driving or alcohol and drug abuse. Teenagers can be overwhelmed by their intense emotions and be unable to talk about them.

What Parents and Caregivers Can Do

Try to take time to compose yourself when you are with your child. If you are calm and confident, your demeanor will encourage your child to feel less afraid.

Encourage your child to talk, draw pictures or tell stories so the child has an opportunity to talk through the experience.

Be a good listener. If your child asks questions, answer as best you can and use words that your child might use.

Give honest answers. If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. Calmly provide answers, even if the question is painful.

Be prepared to explain over and over again. Sometimes

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