



Navy Medicine Family Support and Psychological Health Guidance:

This information is intended to provide support and resources for families addressing the stressors of the recent and on-going events in Japan.

1. Coping with the events: Important information for parents:

Children's Reactions

Children will react differently to a tsunami/earthquake and its aftermath depending on their age, developmental level, and prior experiences. Some will withdraw, while others will have angry outbursts. Still others will become agitated or irritable. Parents should be sensitive to each child's coping style. The following are typical reactions children exhibit following a tsunami or other natural disaster:

- Fear and worry about their safety and the safety of others, including pets
- Fear of separation from family members
- Clinging to parents, siblings, or teachers
- Worry that another tsunami/earthquake will come
- Increase in activity level
- Trouble concentrating or paying attention
- Withdrawal from others
- Angry outbursts or tantrums
- Aggression toward parents, siblings, or friends
- Increase in physical complaints, such as headaches and stomachaches
- Change in school performance
- Long-lasting focus on the tsunami, such as talking repeatedly about it or acting out the event in play
- Increased sensitivity to sounds of crashing waves, wind, rain, or other loud noises
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Changes in appetite
- Lack of interest in usual activities, even playing with friends
- Returning to earlier behaviors, such as baby talk, bedwetting, or tantrums
- Increase in teens' risky behaviors, such as drinking alcohol, using substances, harming themselves, or engaging in dangerous activities
- Panic reactions (e.g., shortness of breath, rapid heartbeat)

What Parents Can Do to Help Their Children

Parents should spend time talking to their children, letting them know that it is okay to ask questions and to share their worries. Issues may come up more than once and parents should remain patient and open to answering questions and clarifying the situation. They should let children know, without overwhelming them with information, what is happening in the family, with their school, and in the community. Parents should answer questions briefly and honestly and ask their children for their opinions and ideas. To help children's recovery, parents should:

- Be a role model. Try to remain calm so that you can teach your child how to handle stressful situations.

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- Monitor adult conversations. Be aware of what adults are saying about the tsunami or the damage. Children listen to adults' conversations and may misinterpret what they hear, becoming unnecessarily frightened.
- Limit media exposure. Protect your child from too many images and descriptions of the tsunami, including those on television, on the Internet, on radio, and in the newspaper.
- Reassure children that they are safe. You may need to repeat this frequently even after the danger has subsided. Be sure to tell them you love them.
- Replace lost or damaged toys as soon as you are able.
- Calm worries about their friends' safety. Even though phones may not be working, reassure your children that their friends' parents are taking care of them, just the way you are taking care of your children.
- Tell children about community recovery. Reassure them that the government is working hard to restore electricity, phones, water, and gas. Tell them that the town or city will be removing debris, helping families find housing, and rebuilding the neighborhood.
- Take care of your children's health.
- Maintain regular daily life. In the midst of disruption and change, children feel more secure with structure and routine. As much as possible, have regular mealtimes and bedtimes.
- Encourage children to help. Children cope better and recover sooner when they help others. Give them small cleanup tasks or other ways to contribute. Afterward, provide activities unrelated to the tsunami, such as playing cards or reading.
- Be extra patient as your children return to school. They may be more distracted and need extra help with homework for a while.
- Give support at bedtime. Children may be more anxious when separating from parents. Spend a little more time than usual talking, cuddling, or reading. Start the bedtime routine earlier so children get the sleep they need. If younger children need to sleep with you, let them know it is a temporary plan, and that soon they will go back to sleeping in their own beds.
- Help with boredom. The tsunami/earthquake may have disrupted the family's daily activities (watching television, playing on the computer, and having friends over) or caused the suspension of extracurricular activities (sports, youth groups, dances, or classes). Help children think of alternative activities, such as board games, card games, and arts and crafts.
- Keep things hopeful. Even in the most difficult situation, your positive outlook on the future will help your children see good things in the world around them, helping them through challenging times.
- Seek professional help if your child still has difficulties more than six weeks after the tsunami/earthquake.

Additional resource:

- **Website for Project FOCUS** (Families Overcoming Under Stress):
<http://www.focusproject.org>