

How to Help Children Cope with Disasters: Tips for teachers

As a teacher, you can play an important role in comforting your students, and in helping them to sort out their thoughts and feelings surrounding the disaster and its impacts on their families and community. The routine and regular contact with teachers and friends helps children to reestablish a sense of safety and security. Your dedication, compassion and skills are needed now more than ever!

Take the extra time and effort to be there for each other. Talk with your fellow teachers and school administration about your experiences, fears and challenges, so that you can support and learn from each other. This is a good way to organize your own thoughts and reactions and prepare for addressing students' concerns and questions.

1. **It is good to talk about the event also at school.** It is not always helpful for children to “forget about it”. Reflect what students say and validate their feelings and experiences. Discuss some of the normal thoughts and feelings they may be experiencing.
2. **Be available to talk one-on-one** with your students; let them know you are there to listen.
3. Peer support is important; **create opportunities for students to work and play together.**
4. **Reassure** students, particularly younger students, **that it is your job to keep them as safe at school as possible** and that their parents or guardians and other adults will take care of them as much as possible as well.
5. **Be prepared for questions from students:** E.g. Why? (Massive destruction is difficult to understand – express understanding that this is difficult to understand and then give an age-appropriate explanation); will things get better? (Do NOT make false promises, but reassure the student that the aid organizations, ministries, police, army are doing everything they can to help and to restore order and infrastructure.)
6. **Encourage students to develop positive methods of coping with stress and fears,** and help them identify which strategies fit each situation. Begin with helping them to identify what they have done in the past that helped them cope when they were scared or upset.
7. **Restore a sense of normality:** Keep calm, stabilize and reassure the children, and get into routines as quick as possible. Do not be afraid to resume usual tasks – homework etc., but do not add to the pressure. Do not accept any behavior that is disruptive or hurtful to others, but understand that there may be reasons behind it!
8. **Have a short moment of silence** for example during assembly; say to the children that we think about all those who are affected.
9. **Learn about referral systems** for children in need of extra care and support provided by your school, by the government or organizations for professional counselors. If one of your students is showing more serious problems that do not show improvement over time, that child may need a referral for more specialized support.
10. **Take extra care of yourself**—your own health and emotions—so that you will be better able to support children in your care. Children do better when the adults around them are confident, calm and reassuring.