

# ***After the Storm***



**A guide to help children cope  
with the psychological effects of a hurricane.**



To our children and their caregivers,

A few years ago, Houstonians would have never dreamed their lives could have been changed overnight. That was before our residents experienced the Memorial Day flood of 2015, the Tax Day flood of 2016, and most recently, Hurricane Harvey. Although just a tropical storm by the time it hit the greater Houston area, Harvey deluged our city with up to 51 inches of water over a five-day period, and resulting reservoir releases added to the misery. The flooding knew no physical or economic boundaries: more than one-third of all Houstonians experienced damage and displacement, including hundreds of thousands of children.

Children, as well as adults, are affected psychologically by hurricanes, causing fear, depression, anxiety, inability to concentrate, and other behavioral changes that can interfere with the recovery process for years after the initial event. These responses to trauma can be particularly intense for those families with children who had to leave their home, family and friends.

A vital part of effective disaster recovery is addressing the mental health needs of children and adults. Designed for children 6-12 years of age, "After The Storm" is a resource that assists parents or other caring adults in helping school-age children recover from the psychological effects of a hurricane. "After the Storm" is an interactive tool with adult- and child-specific pages that guide a parent or caring adult through activities that encourage the development of coping strategies. Such strategies not only help now, but are essential for weathering future storms, physically and psychologically.

Through a generous gift from The Hurricane Harvey Relief Fund of the Greater Houston Community Foundation, The Center for School Behavioral Health at Mental Health America of Greater Houston, in collaboration with the Trauma and Grief Center at Texas Children's Hospital, is providing this resource to support Houston's parents and child-serving professionals as they address children's mental health and well-being in the wake of the storm.

Please let us know if we can provide any other resources or assistance. We are here for you.

With best wishes,

The Center for School Behavioral Health at Mental Health America of Greater Houston  
[www.mhahouston.org](http://www.mhahouston.org)

The Trauma and Grief Center at Texas Children's Hospital  
<https://www.texaschildrens.org/departments/trauma-and-grief-center>

# AFTER THE STORM

A GUIDE TO HELP CHILDREN COPE WITH  
THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF A HURRICANE

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After The Storm was originally created for children and families affected by the devastating 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons by Dr. Annette La Greca ([www.psy.miami.edu/faculty/alagreca](http://www.psy.miami.edu/faculty/alagreca)) and Scott Sevin and Elaine Sevin of 7-Dippity, Inc., who donated their time and services. For information about 7-Dippity, Inc., please go to: [www.7-dippity.com](http://www.7-dippity.com).

This book is dedicated to all the current and former forecasters and staff at the National Hurricane Center for your hard work and selfless devotion to saving lives.

# HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Dear Parent or Caring Adult,

Although a hurricane may last only hours, its effects can last for months or even years. In the aftermath of a hurricane, many parents and caregivers express concerns about how the hurricane and events related to it might affect their children. Common questions are: “What should I tell my child?” “How can I tell if these events are bothering my child?” “What can I do to help my child cope with this disaster?” This book is designed to help parents address these questions.

Children and adults’ reactions to a hurricane will vary depending in part on how much they were directly affected by the storm. Because of this, some parents and children may be more interested in the materials in this book than others. We suggest you:

- **Read the book first** before choosing which topics and activities to do with a child.
- **Evaluate your own stress level** before beginning work on this book. If you feel you are having difficulty with stress, talk to another adult before working on this book.
- **Take care of yourself.** In order to support and help your child, please take care of yourself. Use some of the tips in this book to help yourself (e.g., limit your media exposure, stay healthy, establish a routine, do something fun, etc.). All parents need a break from dealing with the many stressors that accompany a natural disaster, such as a hurricane.

This book contains activities that parents and caring adults can do together with children. The activities are appropriate for children ages 6 to 12 years, but may be adapted for older or younger children as well. We encourage you to adjust the activities and their pace to the child you are working with. Younger children (ages 6 to 8) may need extra help from an adult, and may prefer to complete some activities by drawing rather than by writing. Younger or active children may also prefer working on one topic at a time; others may be able to complete two or more topics in one sitting. Keep in mind that some children prefer to seek out more information than others.

There are 15 Topics covered in this book. For each topic, there is an “Adult Page” on the left and a “Child Page” on the right. Some of the Adult pages have “Joint Activities” for adults and children to complete together.

Each Adult Page has instructions and activities for adults -



Each Child Page contains parallel information and activities for children -



There are five sections in this book. The first section, Topics 1-2, contains activities that may help you “ease into” the book. The second section, Topics 3-5, will help you understand a child’s reactions to a hurricane. The third section, Topics 6-9, covers coping skills that should be helpful for most children. The fourth section, Topics 10-14, focuses on coping skills to help children with specific situations. The fifth section contains information on safety and creating a family hurricane plan (Topics 15-16), as well as answers to some common questions and additional useful information. Even though the topics have been put together in a suggested sequence, feel free to “skip ahead” to those that may be especially useful for your child.

Find a quiet time and place to complete the activities. Explain to your child that the activities in this book are informative and fun and will help them cope with any bad feelings that they are having as a result of the hurricane.

With our best wishes,

Annette La Greca      Scott Sevin

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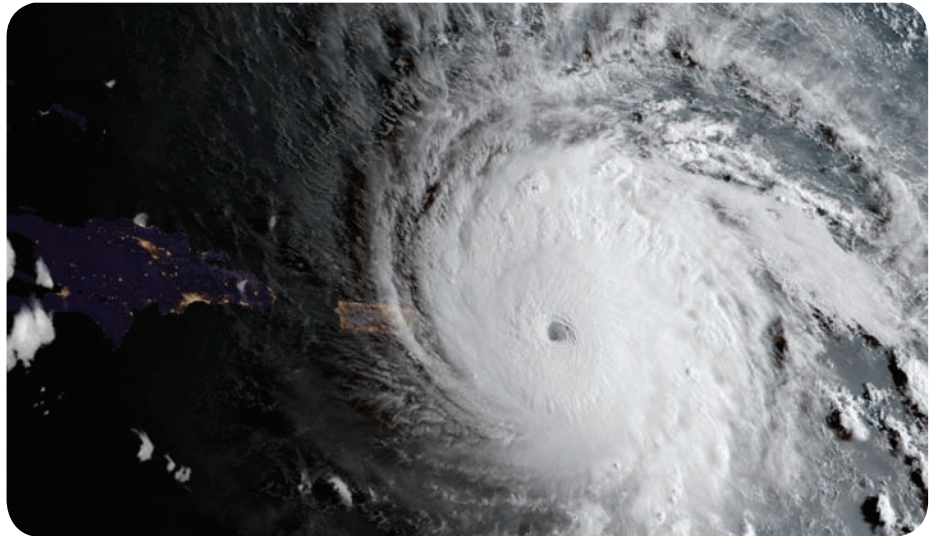
# Understanding Hurricanes – What Is A Hurricane?

Living through a hurricane can be a scary event for children and adults. In the aftermath of a storm, it is important that both physical and psychological needs are attended to. If a child has not previously experienced a hurricane, he or she may not fully understand what a hurricane is (even if they just went through one). Children understand events based on their own experiences, which are more limited than adults' experiences. It is important for children to understand hurricanes and events related to a hurricane landfall in order to help them cope with their reactions and feelings to a storm and its aftermath.

This section will help you assist your child in understanding hurricanes, his or her experiences during a storm, and what has happened to their family, friends, and community as a result of the hurricane. It will also help to clear up any confusion your child may have about the storm or events surrounding it.

## **WHAT IS A HURRICANE?**

A hurricane is a large, organized weather system that forms over warm ocean water. Hurricanes have a pronounced circulation around a calm center with sustained surface winds of 74 mph or more. Hurricanes, also called typhoons or cyclones in other parts of the world, generally form in the summer months, when oceans are at their warmest. The Atlantic hurricane season begins June 1st and ends November 30th.



***Hurricane Irma, 9/6/17***

*Photo: Official NOAA photo (National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration).*

## **JOINT ACTIVITY: Hurricane Vocabulary**

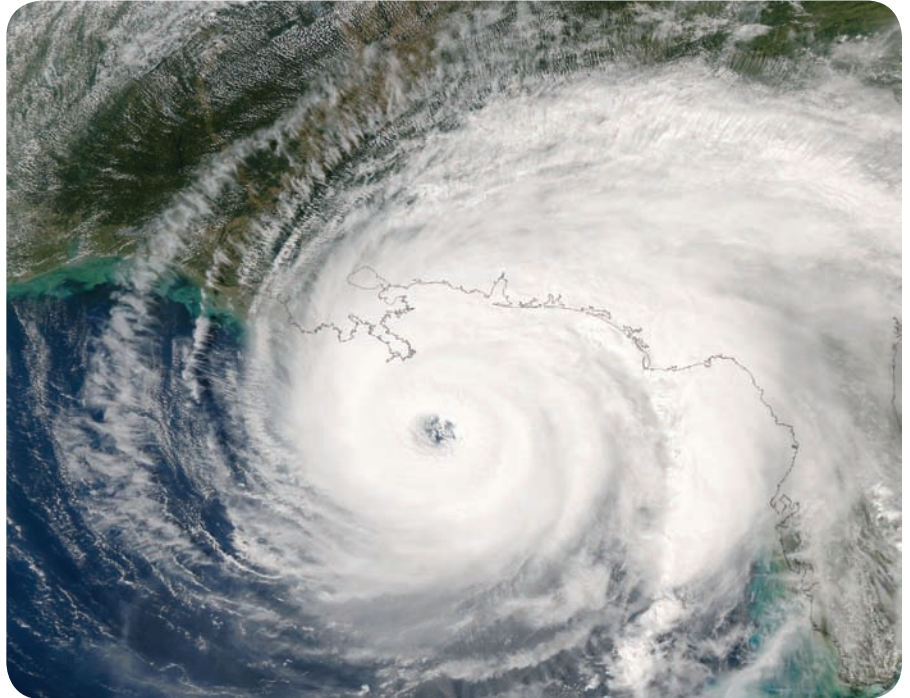
Meteorological or “weather” terms can be confusing to adults as well as children. It will help if your child understands some hurricane-related terms that may be prominent in the media. Below is a list of keywords that you and your child can discuss. Keep in mind that some children may not want to discuss every word. You can read these words to your child and have him or her choose which ones they would like to talk or learn more about. If necessary, look up information on the Internet or at a library, or ask someone who may know.

Tropical Wave	Storm Surge	National Hurricane Center (NHC)
Tropical Depression	Flood	NOAA
Tropical Storm	Eye (of a hurricane)	FEMA
Hurricane	Eye Wall	Tropical Storm Watch/Warning
Saffir-Simpson Scale	Low/High Pressure	Hurricane Watch/Warning
Category 1-5 Hurricane	Rapid Intensification	NHC Track Forecast Cone
Sustained Wind Speed	Landfall	Hurricane Forecast Models
Counterclockwise	Tornado	Evacuation
Wind Gust	Waterspout	Storm Shelter



## What Is A Hurricane?

A hurricane is a large weather system that forms over warm ocean waters. Hurricanes have strong winds (74 mph or more) and thunderstorms that spin or move around a calm center, known as an eye. The word "hurricane" comes from the early Spanish and Indians who thought the "big winds" were sent by evil spirits to hurt them. Over the years, we learned that hurricanes are actually a force of nature that people cannot control.



**Hurricane Ivan, 9/15/04**

*Photo: Official NOAA photo (National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration).*

People who have been through a hurricane say there is a lot of wind and rain in the storm. Sometimes the wind can get very loud. What was the hurricane like when you went through it? Below, draw or write about what you saw or heard during the storm. If you did not go through the hurricane, draw or write about what you think it was like to be in the storm when it hit your neighborhood. Use another sheet of paper if you need more room.



## Understanding Hurricanes – What Happened?

The landfall of a hurricane, especially a major hurricane, typically marks a defining moment in the lives of those affected by the storm. Memories of a hurricane often stay with people for the rest of their lives. For children, however, the significance of such an event may not be immediately understood or their memories of the experience may fade with time. It is helpful for them to remember the events of a hurricane and their own personal experiences. The activities in this section will help you and your child reflect on the storm and what has happened since.

One way to help a child cope with a hurricane – and assist in preventing misunderstandings – is to review what happened before, during and after the storm. When your child is finished working on the activities on Pages 5 and 7, go over his or her responses and talk about the storm. If your child has any incorrect information, help correct those misunderstandings.

### **JOINT ACTIVITY: Create A Timeline**

With your child, create a timeline highlighting important facts and events surrounding the hurricane that hit your area. Begin your timeline by tracking the origin and history of the storm. List significant impacts the hurricane has had on your family and community, and keep track of the recovery efforts. When you are finished, you can place the timeline in a scrapbook (see below).

#### **Example:**

<b><u>Date</u></b>	<b><u>Highlight</u></b>
11:00AM, August 21, 2017	Hurricane Warning issued for our area.
8:00AM, September 14, 2017	Schools reopen in our area.

Note: Older children may be more interested in exact figures (e.g., storm intensity, track, and landfall locations) while younger children may be interested in more general information (storm category, general path, and countries/states hit). Go to: [www.nhc.noaa.gov/pastall.shtml](http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/pastall.shtml) for historical storm information.

### **JOINT ACTIVITY: Our Hurricane Story**

As survivors of a hurricane, you and your child have a special story to tell about your experiences during or after the storm. Together, create your own “hurricane story.” Draw pictures or write about your hurricane experiences. Begin your story before the storm struck and describe what has happened to you and your child since the storm. You can continue to add to your story over the next few weeks and months. If you want, you can place your story in a scrapbook along with newspaper articles, pictures, and other mementos of the storm.







## Understanding What Happened

Being in a hurricane is something that many people never forget. In the future, your children may read about the storm that you just went through. The National Weather Service keeps information on all of the hurricanes and tropical storms that form in the Atlantic Ocean. The information includes where the storm went (track) and how big the storm was (strength). When a storm hits land, more information is collected, such as how much rain fell and how high the winds were in different areas. This information is important because it helps scientists better understand and predict hurricanes. It also helps people build better and safer buildings.

### Assignment: Hurricane Detective

You are a meteorologist working for the National Weather Service. A meteorologist is a scientist who studies the weather. Part of your job is to keep information about the weather in your area. Usually, computers keep track of the weather for you. However, when the hurricane hit, the computers stopped working and did not record the weather for that day. The National Weather Service has asked you to fill in the missing information. Do some research and fill out the form below as best you can. Good luck!

Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
The day the hurricane hit your area

Meteorologist: \_\_\_\_\_  
Your name

Location: \_\_\_\_\_  
Town where you live

Hurricane: \_\_\_\_\_  
Name of hurricane

Time of Landfall: \_\_\_\_\_  
Time when the eye came ashore

Area of Landfall: \_\_\_\_\_  
Where the eye came ashore

Category: \_\_\_\_\_  
Category of hurricane when it came ashore

Storm Direction: \_\_\_\_\_  
Which way the storm was moving

Storm Speed: \_\_\_\_\_  
How fast the storm was moving

Sustained Wind Speed: \_\_\_\_\_ mph  
Highest sustained winds in your area

Peak Wind Gust: \_\_\_\_\_ mph  
Highest wind gust in your area

Rainfall Amount: \_\_\_\_\_ inches  
Amount of rain that fell in your area

Storm Surge/Flooding: \_\_\_\_\_ feet  
How high the water got in your area

Observations (describe the weather on the day the hurricane hit). Use another sheet of paper if you need more room:

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## Understanding How Your Child Feels

Hurricanes, like other traumatic events, affect people in different ways. Life history, personality and a person's experiences during and after a storm all play a role in shaping a person's response. Because some people will be more affected than others, reactions to a storm or its aftermath may differ greatly from person to person.

For many children and adults, an upsetting event such as a hurricane can bring about strong feelings and mixed emotions. As time passes, their feelings about the hurricane may change. This is normal for those who experience a natural disaster or other distressing event. Keep in mind that there may be days and times when you will feel better than others.

### **The Importance Of Asking Children How They Are Feeling**

Research conducted after previous hurricanes reveals that parents, teachers, and other caregivers are often surprised by how much a child was affected by a storm. There can be many reasons for this. During one study (by La Greca and colleagues, 1996), children said that they did not tell their parents or other adults about their true feelings because the children noticed the adults were already upset and they didn't want to upset them further. Research also shows that parents are often not good observers of their child's post-disaster reactions. This is another reason why it is important for you to talk with your child directly to learn about his or her thoughts and feelings.

The activities in this section will help you understand how you and your child are feeling about the hurricane or its aftermath. They will also assist you in talking about feelings with your child. It is a good idea to occasionally repeat these activities, as your child's feelings may change over time.

#### **Adult Activity: How Do You Feel?**

How do you feel about the hurricane? Write your feelings in the columns below. How have your feelings changed since the hurricane first struck? What has stayed the same? If there are any strong emotions you still have that you feel uncomfortable with, such as a lot of anger or sadness, it may help to talk to someone about them.

##### **How I felt after the hurricane first hit**

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##### **How I feel now**

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#### **JOINT ACTIVITY – Know Your Feelings**

Children may not be familiar with all of the different feelings listed in the child activity at the top of Page 9. You can help your child understand these feelings by providing some examples. Try to make it a fun game! You can mimic the faces or act out different situations and have your child guess what the feeling is.



## How I Feel About The Hurricane

When a hurricane hits, people usually have many different kinds of feelings. Some of those feelings may change or go away after a few days or weeks. Complete the activities below to show how you have been feeling about the hurricane that hit your area.

1. Below are pictures and words that describe how some people feel during a hurricane. Circle the faces or create new ones to show how you felt during the storm. You can circle more than one.



Afraid



Angry



Cautious



Confident



Confused



Curious



Disappointed



Disbelief



Disgusted



Enraged



Frustrated



Guilty



Happy



Horried



Hurt



Lonely



Miserable



Nervous



Optimistic



Sad



Scared



Shocked



Surprised



Undecided



Upset



Worried



2. Below, draw or write about how you feel now about the hurricane. You can use the words or pictures from above to help you tell about your feelings.



## Tips For Talking To Children About Feelings

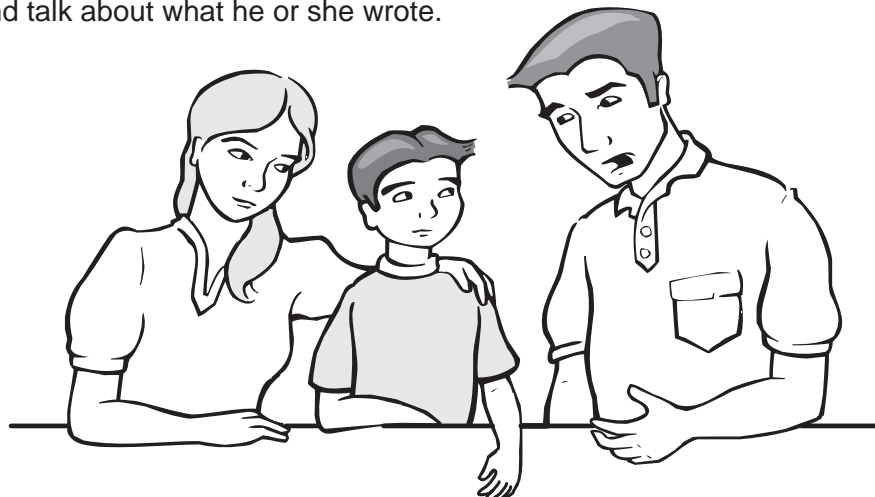
Over the next few weeks and months, there may be more developments related to the hurricane as your family and community cleans up and recovers from the storm. In order to understand how your child is reacting to these events, it will be important to keep the “lines of communication” open. This means creating a comfortable time and place for your child to talk with you about feelings or worries. It will help if you pick a quiet place to talk, away from distractions. Also, try to have a regular time to talk, such as before dinner or after school. Talking before bedtime is not a good idea because your child may have trouble sleeping after discussing upsetting events.

Sometimes your child’s concerns may have to do with the hurricane. Other times, he or she may focus on other events. Either way, the guidelines on this page will help you identify how your child is feeling and the focus of his or her worries. Remember to speak with another adult before speaking with your child if you feel you are having trouble with your own feelings.

### **Here are some guidelines you can use when talking to your child:**

- Listen to your child’s feelings rather than controlling the conversation yourself.
- Acknowledge and normalize your child’s statements by making comments like these:  
*“It sounds like you were very scared.” “That part made you feel sad.” “It’s okay to feel that way.”*
- Be neutral. Do not judge or criticize your child. Make comments like these:  
*“That’s interesting.” “Tell me more about it.” “What do you mean?”*
- It’s okay to say *“I don’t know”* if your child asks a question you cannot answer.
- Express your own feelings, but try to avoid alarming or upsetting your child.
- Pay attention to behaviors that show your child has strong feelings, such as:
  - Fidgeting or squirming.
  - Poor eye contact (doesn’t look at you while talking).
  - Facial expressions that show anger, sadness, or worry.
- Keep in mind that listening to your child is a good way of showing emotional support. Research shows that children with greater emotional support after natural disasters report less stress (La Greca et al. 2010).

On the next page are sentences for your child to complete that will help him or her talk about their day and how they are feeling. You can photocopy the page and have your child keep a daily journal. Each evening, go over your child’s answers and talk about what he or she wrote.





## How I Feel Today

How are you feeling today? Below are some sentences that will help you tell about your day and how you are feeling. Finish the sentences as best you can. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers.

My Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_



Today, I \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The best thing that happened to me today was \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

The thing that bothered me the most today was \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Today, I played \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

What I thought about most today was \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Tomorrow, I want to \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

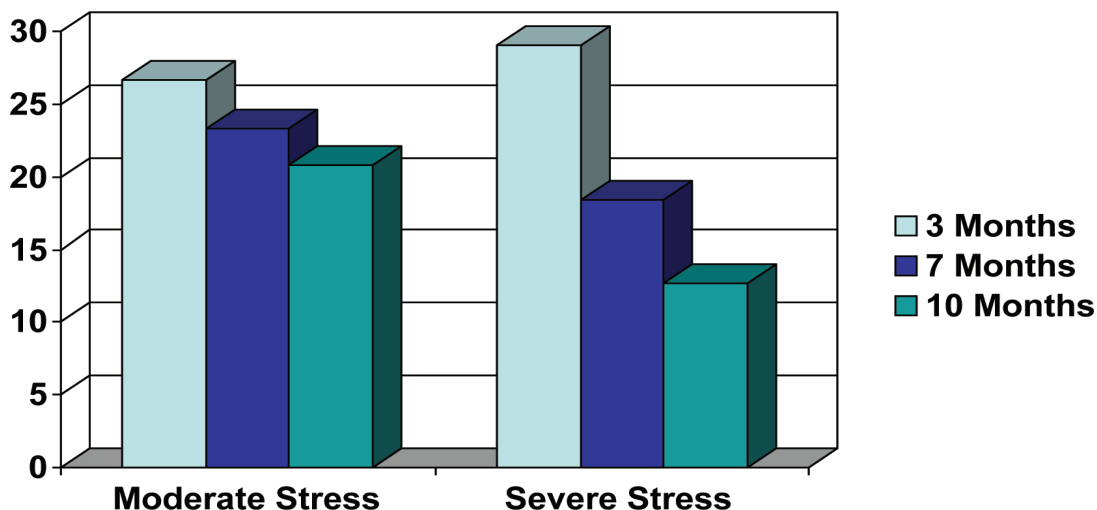




## Understanding Your Child's Stress Reactions

Feelings of anxiety, frustration, anger, and fear are common reactions to a hurricane. Other reactions such as nightmares and difficulty sleeping are common as well. It is normal for children and adults to experience a variety of stress reactions after going through a traumatic event. In fact, thousands of people have reported suffering from stress reactions after previous hurricanes.

### Percentage Of Children Reporting Stress Reactions After Hurricane Andrew



Although stress reactions are normal, they can create problems. For example, difficulty sleeping may make a person more tired, affecting their work performance. Trouble concentrating can hurt a child's performance in school. While stress reactions are common after a hurricane, usually they will lessen after a few weeks. However, if reactions last longer than a couple of months or interfere with everyday activities, a person may need professional assistance in dealing with them.

Sometimes, reactions to a hurricane are severe and can signal a person is suffering from Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). PTSD is a set of trauma symptoms that occur in response to a traumatic event. PTSD can occur in both adults and children. People who suffer from PTSD will need to speak with a mental health professional. For more information on PTSD, ask a counselor or visit the National Institute of Mental Health website at: <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd/index.shtml>.

### **Adult Activity: Evaluate Your Child's Stress Reactions**

Have your child complete the activity on the next page. If your child circled "A LOT" or "SOMETIMES" to any of the questions, use the answer key below to see what coping strategies in the book may be used to help your child with that problem.

#### **Questions circled**

5 and 14  
1, 2, 3, 4 and 11  
6, 7, 8 and 13  
9, 10, 12 and 15  
16, 17 and 18

#### **Possible Problems**

Fears and Worries  
"Re-experiencing" the event  
Avoidance or Emotional Numbing  
Physical Symptoms  
Other specific reactions

#### **Helpful Coping Sections**

see Pages 8, 16, 20 and 28  
see Pages 8, 16, 20 and 32  
see Pages 8, 16, 28 and 36  
see Pages 16, 20, 22 and 32  
see Pages 18, 26, 34 and 36



## How I Have Been Feeling

The sentences below ask your thoughts and feelings about the hurricane. Show how you have been thinking or feeling for the past few weeks by checking the box that best explains how you feel. Do this for each sentence.

	A LOT	SOMETIMES	NEVER
1. I get scared, afraid, or upset when I think about the hurricane	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I keep thinking about what happened.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I think about the hurricane, even when I don't want to.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I have bad dreams.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I worry that another hurricane or something bad might happen.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I don't enjoy things I usually like to do.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I feel that people really don't understand how I feel now.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. I feel so scared, upset, or sad that I can't even talk or cry.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. I feel more jumpy and nervous now than before the hurricane.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. I have not been sleeping well.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11. Thoughts or feelings about the hurricane get in the way of my remembering things, like what I learned in school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
12. It is hard to pay attention in school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
13. I try to stay away from things that remind me of the hurricane.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
14. I worry about things that didn't bother me before, like being away from my family.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
15. I have more stomachaches, headaches, or other sick feelings since the hurricane.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
16. I have been doing things now that I wouldn't do before, like getting into fights, talking back, or disobeying more.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
17. I get mad or angry at friends and family more than normal.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. I feel sad about all the things that have happened.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

(Adapted with permission from Frederick, C.J., Pynoos, R., & Nader, K. (1992). *Reaction Index to Psychic Trauma Form C*. Manuscript, UCLA.)



## Who Is At Risk For Stress Reactions?

If you pay attention to your child's reactions, you will have a good idea of how to help your child. In general, most children will be able to cope with their reactions to a hurricane or other stressful event when provided with some assistance from caring adults. The coping activities on Pages 18-25 will be helpful for most children in coping with a hurricane or other traumatic event (for more specific coping strategies for certain reactions, please see Pages 26-37). Some children will need more support than others in coping with their reactions. A child may be at risk for more severe reactions and will need to be watched more closely if they:

### **During a hurricane....**

- Lost a loved one, friend or pet in the hurricane.
- Were hurt or felt they were going to be hurt during the hurricane.
- Thought they were going to die or felt very upset during or right after the storm.
- Lost their house or belongings in the disaster.

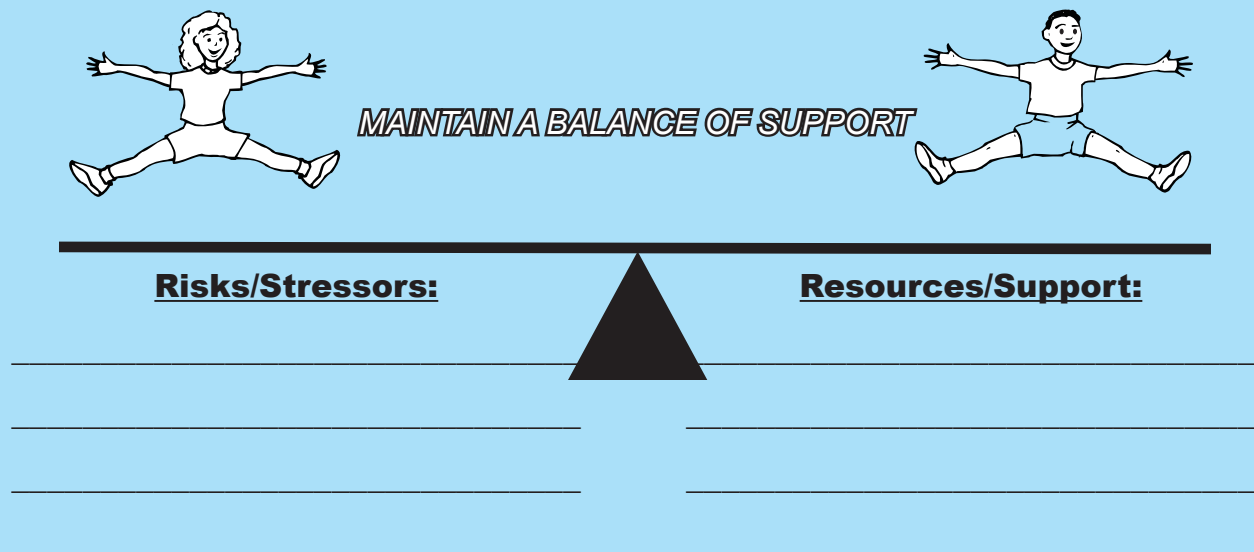
### **Before or after a hurricane...**

- Have academic difficulties.
- Have experienced previous trauma.
- Have a history of behavioral or emotional problems (from before the storm).
- Have had other major stressful events happen to them (parents get a divorce, parent loses job, new sibling born, etc.).
- Have a significant change in their way of life because of the storm (attend a new school, move to a new home or town, etc.).

Keep in mind that a child who was experiencing stress before the hurricane will be particularly vulnerable to experiencing stress after the storm. Also, if another hurricane or other stressful event occurs, many children and adults may re-experience some of their initial stress reactions. If you are unsure about how your child is feeling later on, you can repeat the activities in this section.

## **JOINT ACTIVITY: Keeping A Balance**

One way to help children cope with the stress of a hurricane or other disaster is to build up the number of "resources" available for support. Use the balance beam below to help with this activity. On the left side, write down the "risks" or things causing stress for your child since the storm. On the right side, list the "resources" your child has available for support. Resources can be people such as family members, friends, teachers, or school counselors. Resources can also be organizations such as a club, a Scout group, or places like a YMCA or a house of worship. Try to get the "resources" to balance or outweigh the "risks."





## Gauge Your Stress

A rain gauge is used to measure how much rain has fallen from a storm. Rainwater that falls from a storm gets caught in the rain gauge. As more rain falls, the water reaches a higher number on the scale.

The "Stress Gauge" below is like a rain gauge, except it measures feelings instead of water. How scared or upset are you because of the hurricane or what has happened since the storm hit? Read the Stress Gauge first. Then, starting from the bottom, color in the gauge to the number that best shows how you are feeling. The number 1 means you feel very little stress. The number 10 means you feel a lot of stress and need some help.

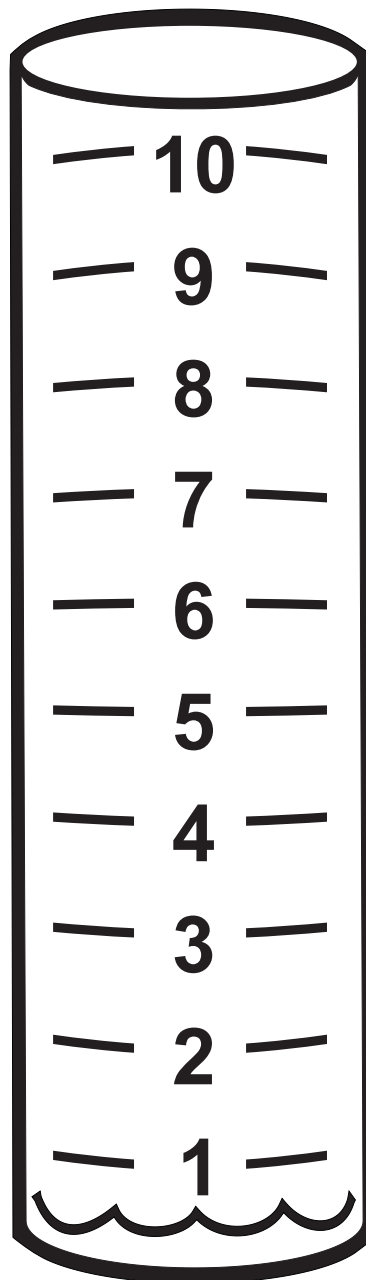
I'm really, really scared and upset. I need help.

I'm very scared and upset. I need extra help to get through this.

I'm scared, but I'll be okay with a little help.

I'm a little scared, but I'm okay.

Nothing scares or bothers me.



HELP! Too much stress!

Very Much

A Lot

Some

A Little Bit

Not At All



## Understanding How Your Child Copes

People cope with their reactions to stressful events in many ways. You and your child have to find ways that work best for each of you. Some ways of coping are more effective than others. For example, some positive ways to cope with stressful events include talking about how you feel, solving problems, trying to remain calm, and trying to look at the positive side of things.

Some ways of coping are not as helpful and can actually cause more harm than good. Yelling, getting angry, and blaming others are all examples of unhelpful ways of coping. These ways of coping can lead to new problems. Children who use unhelpful ways of coping with stress tend to have more difficulty dealing with their reactions to traumatic events such as a hurricane. It is important to recognize when your child is doing something unhelpful and assist him or her in finding a better way to deal with things.

The questions on the next page will help your child reveal how he or she copes with stressful events. Use the answer key below to help you understand your child's responses. Try to encourage positive ways of coping when dealing with upsetting events related to hurricanes or other stressors. Although you may not always know what specific events are upsetting your child, it is always helpful to have your child use positive coping strategies.

### **Some Positive Coping Strategies**

Maintain normal routines.  
Talk with friends/family/coworkers.  
Take up a new hobby.  
Exercise/stay physically healthy.  
Get some rest/take time off/vacation.  
Reduce exposure to news media.  
Write about thoughts and experiences.  
Listen to soothing, calming music.  
Volunteer in the community/help others.  
Look at the positive side of things.  
Talk to a counselor/join a support group.

### **Adult Activity: Identifying How Your Child Copes**

While your child is completing the activity on the next page, think about how he or she usually copes with bad events. On a separate sheet of paper, write in the positive and negative ways your child copes. When you are both finished, go over your answers together.

Positive Ways My Child Copes

---

---

Negative Ways My Child Copes

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---

### **Answer Key To Child Coping Test On Page 17**

Items #3, 6, 9 and 12 are positive coping strategies that you can encourage your child to use. For example, item #3 reflects "having a positive outlook," item #6 reflects "problem solving" and "talking about things that are upsetting," item #9 reflects "keeping calm," and item #12 reflects "seeking support and comfort from others." These coping strategies can help your child deal with stress better. Additional ideas for coping are covered in other sections of this book. "Seeking information" and "finding distraction" can also be helpful ways of coping.

The remaining items on the child's page (#1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, and 11) are unhelpful ways of coping. They usually don't help a difficult situation and sometimes can make things worse. For example, items #1 and 2 reflect "social withdrawal," items #4 and 5 reflect "blaming self or others," item #7 reflects "wishful thinking," items #8 and 11 reflect "angry feelings" and item #10 reflects "feeling helpless." If your child circled some of these, try to help him or her focus on more helpful ways of coping with stress. Again, some sections in this book will give you some good ideas.





## How I Cope With Things That Happen

Below is a list of things that people do to solve problems or feel better when bad things happen. Think about what you have done to feel better about the hurricane or other bad things that have happened to you. Circle YES or NO to tell if you do the things listed in each sentence.

	<u>Do you do this?</u>	
1. I stay by myself.	YES	NO
2. I keep quiet about the bad things that happen.	YES	NO
3. I try to see the good side of things.	YES	NO
4. I blame myself for causing the hurricane to happen.	YES	NO
5. I blame someone else for causing the hurricane to happen.	YES	NO
6. I try to fix the bad things by doing something or talking to someone.	YES	NO
7. I always wish the bad things had never happened.	YES	NO
8. I yell, scream, or get mad.	YES	NO
9. I try to calm myself down.	YES	NO
10. I don't do anything because the bad things can't be fixed.	YES	NO
11. I get mad or angry at others.	YES	NO
12. I try to feel better by spending time with my family, other grownups, or friends.	YES	NO

(Adapted from the KIDCOPE with permission of Anthony Spirito from: A., Stark, L.J., & Williams, C. (1988). Development of a brief checklist to assess in coping in pediatric patients. *Journal of Pediatric Psychology*, 13, 555-574.)



## Things That Can Help – Normal Routines

One of the most upsetting aspects of hurricanes and other disasters are the disruptions they cause to everyday life. Normal activities and routines provide children and adults with a sense of comfort, as their days are more predictable. If these activities and routines are abruptly changed or disrupted, they can shake a person's feelings of safety and security.

When a hurricane hits an area, especially a powerful one, everyday activities and routines may be disrupted for a long period of time. Schools may close, power may be out, and clean water may not be available for weeks or longer. Extracurricular activities your child may participate in such as dance classes or sports leagues may be cancelled. Further, your family or your child's friends may have to move to another area.

To assist in coping with these disruptions, it will be helpful to keep your child in as normal a routine as possible. Although this may be difficult, particularly if your area is hard-hit, try making arrangements with family and friends who can assist. If your family has evacuated or moved, try to establish a new or temporary routine for your child. For example, have your child do chores at a given time each day, have a regular reading or study hour, and have a regular time for exercise. Be creative and develop a plan that is as similar to your child's normal routines as possible.

This section is designed to help you and your child identify "normal routines." You may wish to photocopy Page 19 and let your child complete their activities for both normal weekday and weekend routines, as these routines usually differ. For younger kids, this may be best done as a joint activity.

### **Adult Activity: Identify Your Normal Routines**

In times of stress, it is important that you monitor your own routines. Over the next few weeks, keep track of your day. On a sheet of paper, write down each activity you do and the amount of time you spend doing it. Break down your activities into the following categories: Children, Home, Family (other than children), Friends, Work, and Self. At the end of each week, calculate the total amount of time spent in each category.

	Children	Home	Family	Friends	Work	Self
Mon.						
Tues.						
Wed.						
Thurs.						
Fri.						
Sat.						
Sun.						
<b>Total</b>						

You may find that you need to have more time to yourself. If so, adjust your routines and make extra time to relax, spend with a friend or loved one, or have more fun. If you feel relaxed and in control, you will be better able to cope with your own concerns and assist your family with theirs.

### **JOINT ACTIVITY: Add Some Fun To Your Daily Routines**

Together, review your child's routine list from Page 19. It may be the case that your child's routine has changed since the hurricane – this is okay. Have your child highlight or put a star next to his or her favorite activities. Then, make a list of favorite activities you and your child enjoy doing together. When possible, try to add some of these favorite shared activities to both of your daily routines. Also, make time for your child to see his or her friends, as friends are an important source of social support.



## My Daily Routines

What is your daily routine? On the left side, list things that you do on a normal day. When you are done, complete the clocks on the right side. Draw in the missing hands on each clock to show what time you normally do that activity.

### What I normally do

In the morning:

---

---

---

---

---

In the afternoon:

---

---

---

---

---

In the evening:

---

---

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---

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Before bedtime:

---

---

---

---

---

Are there any favorite activities you have not done recently that you would like to do? If so, write about them below.

---

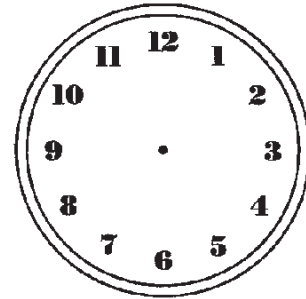
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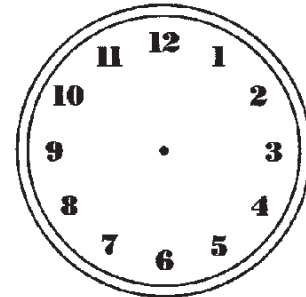
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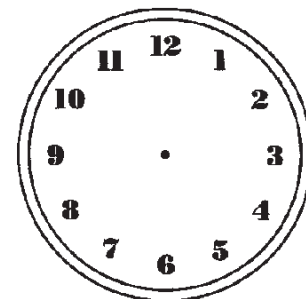
### Complete the clocks



What time I normally wake up.



What time I normally eat lunch.



What time I normally go to bed.



## Things That Can Help – Reducing Exposure

Another way to help children cope with a hurricane is to reduce their exposure to upsetting images that may “remind” them of a storm. Children who are exposed to upsetting pictures or video of a traumatic event usually report more distress than children who are not exposed to such images. This is because visual images are ways of re-experiencing a traumatic event. These disturbing reminders can lead to reactions such as increased fears, bad dreams, and trouble sleeping. Try to help your child avoid images of hurricanes, storm-related damage, or other disasters.

Because media images can be disturbing, it will help to limit your child’s viewing of hurricane-related programs on TV or of photos and video on the Internet. This is especially true if another storm approaches your area. In particular, limit programs or websites with images of destruction or stories about families who were hurt by such storms. These types of programs may be most available when another storm approaches your area, at the beginning or end of a hurricane season, or around the anniversary of a previous hurricane.

### Prepare vs. Scare

Many news stations report on hurricanes and other disasters in a dramatic and sometimes scary way. One way to reduce stress is to turn the television or computer off once you and your family have the information you need (e.g., updates from the National Hurricane Center, which are usually delivered once every few hours). Too much viewing will scare, rather than prepare.

### **Adult Activity: Develop Your Own Media Viewing Guide**

Develop a plan to promote positive viewing habits. This will help limit your child’s exposure to upsetting pictures or videos of hurricanes or other scary events. Follow these rules:

LIMIT – the amount of time your child watches television or surfs the Internet unattended. Choose ahead how much time your child can watch TV or use the computer or smart phone each day. Limit your own time as well to set a good example. Use parental settings on devices whenever possible.

PLAN – with your child, in advance, what shows he or she will watch. Use a TV Guide or newspaper to help you decide with your child, in advance, what TV programs to watch or which websites to visit. Use parental control features to restrict access to certain cable channels, television programs or websites. Turn off electronics when time is up.

PARTICIPATE – in watching TV programs or surfing the Internet with your child. You can occasionally ask if there is anything that your child has questions about or that bothers them. Turn a program off if it becomes upsetting and talk to your child about it.

ENCOURAGE – your child to participate in other fun activities like reading, sports, or other hobbies. Make sure you have non-electronic games available in case you lose electricity. These activities will provide a distraction from upsetting events and help your child feel more in control.

### **JOINT ACTIVITY: A Fun Distraction**

Before or after a hurricane, the media will focus on events related to the storm. Stay informed as to what is happening, but do not spend too much time watching storm information on TV or the Internet. It can add to already high stress levels. Try to find a balance. If your area is under a hurricane watch or warning, make sure your family makes the necessary preparations. Involve your child in “getting ready.” However, once the preparations are complete, do something fun as a distraction. If possible, do something outside such as playing catch, riding bikes, or taking a walk. You can also play cards, board games, or watch movies with your child. Let your child participate in some favorite activities (see the next page) or spend time with a friend.



## What I Like

Fill in the blanks. Tell how many days a week you do each activity listed.

### ACTIVITY

### DAYS PER WEEK

Watch TV	_____
Listen to music	_____
Play with friends	_____
Do family activities	_____
Read a book	_____
Play videogames	_____
Play sports	_____



### List your favorites for each category:

My favorite hobbies are: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

My favorite sports are: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

My favorite musicians are: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

My favorite books are: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_







## Things That Can Help – Staying Physically Healthy

Stress affects people physically as well as mentally. After a distressing event, many people do not feel like eating or may have trouble sleeping. These changes make it harder for a person to cope with stress. Just as it is important to continue normal everyday activities, it is also important to stay active and healthy. This is especially true for children. A child who is healthy and physically fit will find it easier to cope with stress. In fact, all of us do better when we feel strong and healthy.

The activities in this section are designed to help you identify changes in your child's eating, sleeping, and exercise habits. They are also designed to help improve your child's overall health, including diet and physical condition. Have your child complete the activity on the next page while you finish the one below.

### **Adult Activity: Track Your Child's Health**

Observe your child over the next few days. Note any parts of your child's health behaviors that are a problem or that have changed recently. Write down any problems or changes you have noticed in the following categories:

<b><u>Eating meals:</u></b>	<b><u>Sleeping or resting:</u></b>
<b><u>Exercise:</u></b>	<b><u>Increased complaints:</u></b>

### **JOINT ACTIVITY: Coping Chart**

Take a look at the physical changes you noticed in your child. If there are areas that need improvement, work together on creating a "Coping Chart." List things you and your child can do to better cope with any physical changes. Include some of your child's answers from the next page. Some examples are:

<b><u>Eating (lack of appetite):</u></b> Drink a milkshake with fruit. Take vitamins. Have a regular family mealtime. Purchase healthy snacks (raisins, carrots).	<b><u>Trouble falling or staying asleep:</u></b> Sleep in a cool, dark room (or a night-light if afraid of the dark). Snuggle with a favorite doll. Play soft music. Count backward from 100.
<b><u>Exercise (lack of):</u></b> Join a sports league or youth group. Learn a new sport (tennis or dance lessons). Develop a personal exercise routine. Do outdoor activities (hiking, biking, etc.).	<b><u>Increased physical complaints:</u></b> Have child checked by family doctor. Practice a relaxation exercise to reduce stress.



## How I Stay Healthy

By keeping healthy, you can deal better with the things that bother you. In the boxes below, write or draw what you do to keep healthy for each category. Some examples are given to help you get started.

### My favorite healthy foods

Apples



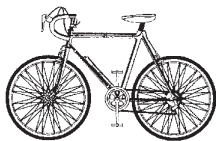
### How I relax before bedtime

Listen to music



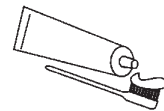
### My favorite ways to exercise

Ride my bike



### How I keep my body healthy

Brush my teeth





## Things That Can Help – Helping Others & Giving Thanks

Helping others and giving thanks can be positive ways to cope with feelings. In fact, research shows that “helping others” and “expressing thanks” leads to positive emotions. These activities can help your child feel that he or she is contributing something positive after a disaster. Helping others and giving thanks also teaches children about the virtues of compassion, kindness, and doing good deeds.

Helping can be done in many ways. It can be as simple as opening a door for somebody, completing chores at home, donating goods to families in need, volunteering time at a local animal shelter, or helping a neighbor with their cleanup efforts. Be creative; use your talents and strengths to think of ways to help others. Below are some ways you and your child can help others in your community. What are some other ways you can help others?

### **Volunteering**

Volunteering your time to assist a worthy cause or help others is an excellent way to support your community. Getting started is easy. Research different community-service and charitable organizations in your community and choose ones that interest you. Then, give them a call. Encourage your child to volunteer as well by choosing projects that you can work on together. If you have friends or family who were affected by a hurricane, volunteer to help them with chores, errands, or babysitting. Many residents affected by hurricanes cannot afford, or are unable, to repair or rebuild their homes. You can assist by helping them repair damages or clean up storm debris.



**To find out about volunteer opportunities in your community, dial 2-1-1, go to [www.unitedway.org](http://www.unitedway.org), or contact your local United Way.**

### **Donating**

You and your child also can help by donating to a local charity or hurricane relief drive. Children can donate toys, clothes, books, games, and other items. Adults can donate money, goods, or services. Businesses can even help by donating in-kind services or goods to the community. Contact an agency that is working with hurricane survivors to find out how you may be able to assist.

### **Giving Thanks**

Expressing gratitude also can be done in many ways. Giving thanks works best when it is a routine practice. It involves both feeling and expressing thanks for the world you live in, for your family or friends, or for any other aspect of your life or community. For example, you could keep a diary and write down one thing you are thankful for each day. Or, you could write a note to a family member, friend, or community helper (e.g., firefighters, police) to thank them for their help and support. Notes of appreciation also can be sent to teachers, family members, and others. Parents and other caregivers can be wonderful models to children for expressing thanks!

### **JOINT ACTIVITY: Everyday Can Be Thanksgiving!**

Parents can model “giving thanks” and also encourage their children to practice gratitude daily. Choose a time each day (dinner, bedtime, etc.), and share something you are thankful for with your child (a sunny day, a nice meal, a polite gesture, etc.). Then, ask your child to share something that he or she noticed that day and are thankful for. Your child can write what they are thankful for in a daily log (see Page 25).



## Helping Others and Giving Thanks

Many people like to help others after a hurricane. No matter how old you are or where you live, you can do things to help other people. For example, you can open a door for somebody, complete an extra chore at home, or offer to help an elderly person. You can even join a service club and participate in community-service projects.

### How I Can Help!

Below, list things you can do to help others. When you are finished, go over the list with an adult and choose which ones you would like to do. You can even add some of these to your daily routines. For example "I can help my teacher by cleaning the chalkboard."

I can help \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_.

I can help \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_.

I can help \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_.

I can help \_\_\_\_\_ by \_\_\_\_\_.

### Giving Thanks Everyday

In life, there are a lot of things to be thankful for, such as having a good friend, being given a present, or watching a beautiful sunset. Even in a disaster, there are things to be thankful about. For example, some people are thankful for firefighters who rescue them from damaged buildings. What are some of the things you are thankful for? Below is a weekly chart. For each day, write down at least one thing you are thankful for.

**Today, I am thankful for:**

Mon: \_\_\_\_\_

Tue: \_\_\_\_\_

Wed: \_\_\_\_\_

Thu: \_\_\_\_\_

Fri: \_\_\_\_\_

Sat: \_\_\_\_\_

Sun: \_\_\_\_\_



## Coping With Changes

A hurricane can be a life-changing event. The powerful storms have the ability to alter landscapes, as well as the lives of people in their path. Those who live through a hurricane or other traumatic event commonly experience changes. For some, changes may be dramatic, such as a change in their way of life (e.g., a move to a new city, a new job, or changes brought on by the loss of a loved one). Others may experience more subtle changes, such as a change in the way they feel about something (e.g., they no longer feel the same way about their neighborhood). Still, some people may experience little or no change.

How you cope with any changes, and your attitude toward them, will ultimately determine how changes impact you. It helps to look at the positive side of things, no matter what changes occur. The activities in this section will help you identify changes that have occurred for you and your child since the hurricane. For each change that you identify, try to think of a way to help you better deal with that change.

### **Adult Activity: Changes Since The Storm**

Like others who have faced hurricanes, you and your child are coping with the aftermath of a storm. Some people may feel that they were not as affected by the hurricane or events surrounding the storm. For others, the hurricane may have brought about significant changes. What changes, if any, has the hurricane had on you? Divide a sheet of paper into five columns: Home, Work/School, Community, Thoughts/Feelings, and Other (parts of your life). In each column, write down changes that have occurred in that part of your life since the hurricane. Have these changes been for the better or for the worse? How have you coped with these changes? Remember, you can have a change in thoughts or feelings as well as physical changes.

HOME	WORK/ SCHOOL	COMMUNITY	THOUGHTS/ FEELINGS	OTHER

### **JOINT ACTIVITY: Positive Changes**

In every disaster or tragedy, there are some positive outcomes. For example, after Hurricane Andrew, building codes were made stricter in Miami-Dade County so that safer buildings would be built, saving more lives in future hurricanes. This is an example of a positive change that can come out of a disaster. While it may be difficult to find positive outcomes, looking at the positives can help keep a disaster in perspective, and help you and your child cope with changes and any feelings of sadness and loss.

Together with your child, list positive changes that occurred as a result of the hurricane that hit your area. You can divide them into categories, such as positive changes for your family, for your community, and in other ways. Also, list the lessons you and your child have learned that will help you better prepare for and cope with future hurricanes.





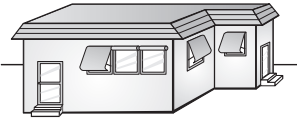
## Changes Since The Hurricane

Hurricanes are powerful storms that can change many things. Hurricanes can change the land around you. For example, hurricanes can blow down trees and wash away islands. Hurricanes can also change how and where people live. For example, a hurricane may damage or destroy a family's home and force the family that was living there to move somewhere else. Sometimes hurricanes can change the way people think or feel about something. For example, a person whose home was flooded by a hurricane may not feel like living in that home anymore.

What changes has the hurricane caused for you? Below, write down changes the hurricane caused in each of the categories. Some changes may last only for a short period of time. Other changes may last longer. Circle the changes that have returned to normal (the way they were before the hurricane hit).

### CHANGES CAUSED BY THE HURRICANE:

Changes at home:



Changes at school:



Changes in my neighborhood:



Changes in how I feel about things:



Other changes the hurricane caused:



## Coping With Fears And Worries – Identifying Fears and Worries

After experiencing a traumatic event, children and adults often feel more fearful and worried. These feelings are common after a natural disaster that causes a lot of damage and disrupts lives, such as a hurricane. Hurricanes can bring about a whole new set of fears and worries for people that may not have been present before. They can also increase fears that already exist. For example, after a hurricane strikes an area, it is common for children and adults to have heightened worries about their personal safety, the safety of loved ones, and fears of future hurricanes.

In general, fears and worries are normal. However, if they interfere with your child's activities (e.g. such as keeping them from going to school or playing with friends), then your child will need more help in dealing with them. In order for you to be able to help your child cope with his or her worries, you must understand the kinds of things your child worries about. This section is designed to help you and your child identify and cope with some of your fears and worries.

Keep in mind that although your child may express fears related to a hurricane, he or she may be worried, or even more concerned, about things unrelated to the storm. Also, since worries can be learned through TV and other media sources, we have included a section to help reduce media use (see Page 20). You might also find a relaxation exercise helpful (see Page 42). Because the focus of your child's worries may change over time, it is a good idea to repeat this section periodically.

### **Adult Activity – What Are Your Worries?**

Children, especially young children, can learn about potential sources of fear and worry by observing or listening to the adults around them, such as their parents and teachers. Because of this, it will be helpful for you to identify the things you worry about, and that you might unintentionally communicate to a child. On a sheet of paper, write down the fears and worries you currently have. You can divide these into subjects, such as worries about your family, your job, or your community. When you are finished, highlight the things that bother you the most.

### **Adult Activity – Your Child's Worries**

Do you know what your child worries about? Often, parents are surprised by the kinds of things that bother their children or underestimate the degree of their child's concerns. While your child completes the activity on the next page, make a list of the things that you think he or she worries about. Highlight the ones you feel bother your child the most. When finished, compare your answers with your child's. Which worries did you get correct? Which ones did you miss? Which of your child's fears or worries, if any, surprised you?





## What Do You Worry About?

Everybody has worries. Sometimes a worry can make you feel upset. This is because you think something bad might happen. For example, you might worry that you will get a bad grade on a test or that you will get a shot when you visit the doctor's office. Below, write down some of your worries that bother you.

Some worries can be very scary and may upset you more than others. To the right of each worry, circle the words that best explains how much that worry bothers you. Circle whether you think about that worry a little bit, sometimes, or a lot of the time.



My Worry

My worry bothers me:

_____	A little	Sometimes	A lot
_____	A little	Sometimes	A lot
_____	A little	Sometimes	A lot
_____	A little	Sometimes	A lot
_____	A little	Sometimes	A lot
_____	A little	Sometimes	A lot
_____	A little	Sometimes	A lot
_____	A little	Sometimes	A lot
_____	A little	Sometimes	A lot
_____	A little	Sometimes	A lot
_____	A little	Sometimes	A lot



## Coping With Fears and Worries – Lessening Fears and Worries

Although fears and worries are common and normal, they can become a problem. Learning how to cope with them is important. In general, talking to someone, gradually facing fears, and finding practical solutions are all positive ways of coping with fears and worries.

**Talk to someone** – Sometimes worries lessen when a child has someone to share them with. Help your child identify “worry friends” he or she can talk to when feeling worried or scared (see activity on Page 31). List people in school (e.g., school counselors, teachers), at home (e.g., parents, older siblings), and in the community (e.g., friends, relatives). Keep a list of your child’s worry friends’ names and phone numbers on a piece of paper, and let your child carry a copy with them. This may help your child to feel better.

**Gradually face fears** – Children who are able to face fears in a gradual and safe manner may become less fearful. For example, a child who is nervous about being left alone with a babysitter while a parent leaves the house may become less fearful if a parent does leave and return home safely on several occasions. Reward your child for facing fears. Do not reward your child’s fears by letting your child avoid school or chores, or by giving in to your child’s wishes because of fears and worries.

**Find practical solutions** – Often, a worry can be lessened or overcome by thinking of a practical and simple plan to cope with or overcome that worry. For example, if your child is worried about starting a new school, try to think of ways to help your child cope with this worry. You can take a tour of the school ahead of time with your child, have a family member drop off and pick up the child at school, and suggest the teacher assign a “classroom buddy” to assist your child. These simple solutions may help your child feel better about entering a new school or making new friends.

### **Joint Activity – Develop A Worry-Buster Plan**

Developing a “Worry-Buster” plan to help your child deal with fears or worries can be a fun activity. Obtain some blank note cards. On one side, have your child write down a fear or worry that bothers them (see Child Activity on Page 29). Then, together, think of positive things your child can do or think of to “bust that worry” and feel better! Write these helpful ideas on the back of the card. Your child can memorize the cards or carry copies with them. See the example below.

#### **Front (Worry):**

Another hurricane will hit

#### **Back (Solutions):**

Limit viewing of media coverage about hurricanes.

Let child help with storm preparations.

Go over family disaster plan.

Talk with child and answer any questions.



## Coping With Worries

Sometimes worries can be very upsetting. When a worry upsets you, it is important to talk with a parent or other adult about it. Talking about the things that bother you will help you feel better about them. Who can you talk to about your fears or worries? Think of some "worry friends" and list them below. A "worry friend" is someone you trust and can talk to when you feel upset or worried. Choose one or two adults at home, in your school, and in your community who can be your "worry friends." Ask a parent or other adult to help you with this activity.

### My Worry Friends:

At Home: \_\_\_\_\_

At School: \_\_\_\_\_

In The Community: \_\_\_\_\_

Another way to help you feel better about your worries is to create a Worry-Buster plan. Pick five of the worries you listed on Page 25 that bother you a lot and write them below. Then, with an adult, think of things you can do to beat that worry! Write your plan to **BUST THAT WORRY** on the right side.



**My WORRY**

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.



**My WORRY-BUSTER PLAN**

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.



## Coping With Intrusive Thoughts And Dreams

Sometimes after a traumatic event, children keep thinking about the event or “see images” related to the event in their mind, even though they don’t want to. For example, a child might keep thinking about a hurricane or might visualize trees falling or their house being flooded, even when they are in school or doing other activities. Sometimes these upsetting thoughts happen at bedtime and make it difficult for children to fall or stay asleep.

Many children have bad memories of a prior hurricane and may have worries, fears, or nightmares when there are “reminders” of the storm (e.g., a heavy rain or strong winds). If this is the case with your child, you may find that experiencing another hurricane can make your child’s stress reactions even stronger.

Although these reactions are common, especially during the first few weeks or months after a hurricane, the unwanted images may be very stressful. If your child has these kinds of thoughts or images, or has nightmares and trouble sleeping, the activities in this section may be helpful. If these unwanted thoughts or images persist, even after trying these activities, it may be a good time to seek professional help (see Page 43 for suggestions).

One way to stop intrusive thoughts is to encourage your child to redirect thinking away from the upsetting thoughts and focus on something more positive. If the thoughts happen at bedtime, it will help to have a routine that focuses on something pleasant and distracting, such as a bedtime story or playing relaxing music (see Normal Routines on Page 18). It will also help to limit TV and other media viewing (see Reducing Exposure, Page 20), promote good health (see Staying Physically Healthy, Page 22) and encourage your child to do more enjoyable things. Also, encourage your child to tell you about any nightmares, as it will help them go away.

### **JOINT ACTIVITY: STOP Bad Thoughts**

Ask your child if he or she has any thoughts about hurricanes, or if any “pictures” or “images” come into their head that bothers them. If so, tell your child that this is normal after something scary like a hurricane happens. Try and find out when these bad thoughts occur (at bedtime, in school, etc.). Next, explain to your child that when he or she has bad thoughts or images, they should STOP and think about something else. Tell your child that you will make a Stop Sign together to remind them to STOP and do something else when they have bad thoughts.

Together, complete the next page. You may want to copy the page before you work on it so your child will be able to carry a copy with them. On the top half of the page is a STOP sign. Let your child color it in. Below the sign is a space for you and your child to write down OTHER things your child can do when he or she starts to have bothersome thoughts. This may depend on whether the thoughts occur during the day or at night. The following are examples to give you and your child some ideas.

#### **DAYTIME**

Call a friend  
Call a parent  
Read a book  
Ride a bike  
Hug a parent  
Sing or hum a song

#### **NIGHTTIME or BEDTIME**

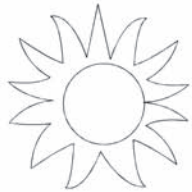
Read a story  
Listen to music  
Count backward from 100  
Practice relaxation (see page 42)  
Draw a picture  
Have a parent “tuck” you into bed

(Adapted with permission from Robin Gurwitsch and Anne Messenbaugh, *Healing After Trauma*.)





## When You Have Bad Thoughts Or Dreams:



....and think of OTHER things to do.



**DAYTIME**

**NIGHTTIME or BEDTIME**

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When you have a bad thought or dream, it will also help to STOP what you are doing and think of a peaceful or happy place. Below, draw or write about a peaceful place that you can think of when you have a bad thought or dream.



## Coping With Angry Feelings

It is not unusual for children and adults to have angry feelings after a disaster, especially if they were personally affected by it. In fact, everybody feels more stressed after a hurricane, as life is more difficult. Disruptions caused by a hurricane may last for a long period of time, which can add to already high levels of stress. While things may be frustrating, it is important to remember that many people are in a similar situation. You and your child must find positive ways to deal with any angry feelings you have.

Often, children may want to “blame others” for bad things that happened, or may just be more irritable than usual. If your child is feeling angry or irritable, explain that it is okay to feel that way. This is a very normal feeling. Explain, however, that it is NOT okay to take out angry feelings on other people. For example, it is okay to feel angry, but not okay to fight and argue with others. Also, it is not okay to do something mean to someone else or to an animal.

The activities in this section will help your child manage angry feelings and resolve conflicts with others. They also will help you develop a plan to assist your child in managing his or her anger.

### **Adult Activity: Develop An Anger Management Plan**

Keep a brief diary of your child’s behavior over the next few weeks. Take notes on what happens before, during, and after each angry outburst. Use this to develop an “anger management” plan.

**Before** – Who does your child get angry at? What situations trigger the anger?

**During** – What does your child do when angry? What is his or her behavior?

**After** – What happens after? Do you discipline your child? Do you ignore the behavior?

If your child gets angry or annoyed at the same person or in the same situation, try changing the situation to prevent the angry outbursts. For example, if your child gets angry when a sibling changes the television channel, it may help to have family rules about television viewing. You also can have your child “talk through” angry feelings with the person who is the target.

Also, look at what happens after your child gets angry. Does your child get his or her way? Try not to ignore angry behavior or to “give in” to your child’s misbehavior. Instead, calmly explain that “feeling angry” is okay, but “acting angry” is not. Have your child sit quietly until he or she calms down and then talk over what is bothering them to see if the situation can be resolved. If this doesn’t work, you may have to discipline your child. For example, depending on your child’s age, you can have them miss a favorite TV show, go to bed a half hour early, or do an extra chore.

### **JOINT ACTIVITY: Role Playing**

Have your child complete the activities on the following page. Afterward, go over your child’s ideas for positive things to do when feeling angry and help identify additional things they can do (e.g., writing, drawing). Then, play a “pretend” game with your child. You pretend to do something annoying and your child has to practice one of the positive things he or she listed in the activity at the bottom of Page 35. Involve other family members as well.



## Managing Angry Feelings

Some people may feel angry or upset after a hurricane. They may feel this way because a hurricane can cause a lot of damage and make life harder for them and their families.

1. Below, write down the ways in which the hurricane made life harder for you (both at home and at school). Use another sheet of paper if you need more room.

Example: My house lost power and I was very hot.

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2. Life may also be harder for your family, friends, and teachers. Below, write about how you think things are harder for the rest of your family, friends, and teachers.

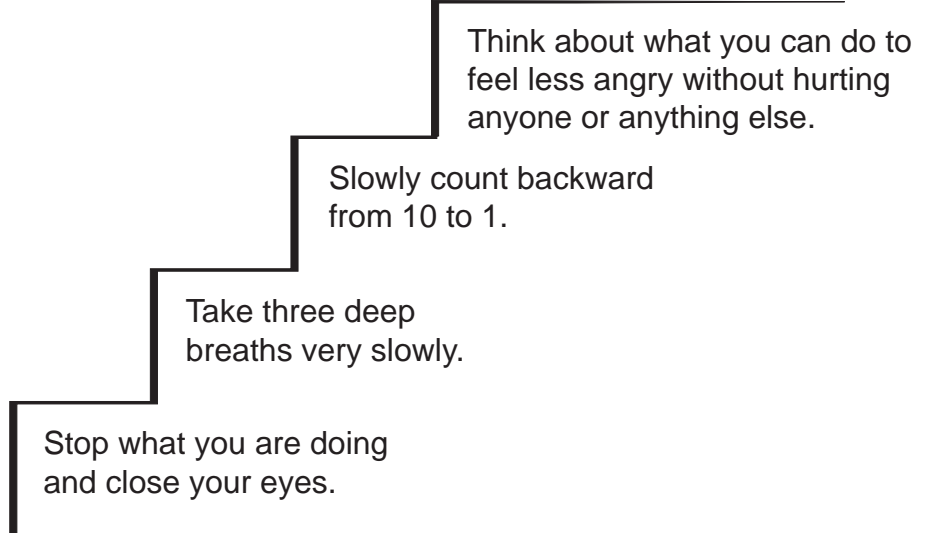
Example: My teacher couldn't go to work because of the hurricane.

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Sometimes when bad things happen, people get angry or upset more than normal. It is okay to feel angry, but it is not okay to take your angry feelings out on other people. If you are angry with someone or get into an argument, it will help if you follow these simple steps:



3. On a separate sheet of paper, draw or write about "helpful" things you can do when you feel angry or get into an argument with someone. If you need some ideas, ask an adult for help.



## Coping With Sadness And Loss

After a traumatic event, children and adults may have feelings of sadness and loss. These feelings are common after a hurricane, especially for people who lost a loved one or a pet in the storm, whose way of life has changed significantly since before the storm, or whose personal belongings were damaged or destroyed in the hurricane. Even if people did not lose anything in the storm, they may still feel sad. There are many reasons why people feel sad. Sometimes they feel badly for the people who lost their homes or businesses, they don't know what to do to help the situation, or because things just "aren't the same" since the hurricane.

The activities in this section will help you and your child identify and talk about feelings of sadness and loss. If you are concerned about your child feeling sad, review the information below on "Recognizing Signs of Depression."

### **In general, some things that can help when you feel sad are:**

- Focusing on the positive things you still have (e.g., health, loved ones, etc.).
- Talking to a friend or family member when feeling "blue."
- Doing activities you normally enjoy.
- Doing things to help others (see Helping Others on Page 24 for some ideas).

### **Special note for parents: Recognizing Signs of Depression**

Feeling sad, depressed, and irritable is common after a traumatic event. These feelings may be a part of normal bereavement or mourning. However, if the feelings last for several weeks or interfere with your daily life, it may help to seek professional advice and counseling.

### **Some signs of depression in children include:**

- Persistent sad or irritable mood
- Loss of interest in usual activities
- Changes in appetite or weight
- Feeling worthless or unloved
- Repeated thoughts of suicide or death
- Difficulty concentrating
- Difficulty sleeping or oversleeping
- Loss of energy
- Lacks interest in playing with friends, bored
- Poor school performance
- Unexplained irritability, crying, complaining
- Increased anger, hostility or irritability
- Extreme sensitivity to failure or rejection
- Frequent, non-specific physical complaints
- Difficulties in personal relationships with family or friends

### **JOINT ACTIVITY: Positive Coping Ideas**

Together, complete the activity on the next page. Focusing on the things you did not lose is a helpful way of coping with sadness and loss. Your child may need help because some things can be hard to name or draw (e.g., loss of a sense of safety). When your child is finished, discuss some positive things he or she can do to feel better. Adding fun activities to your daily routine (see Page 18) may also help.

I may have lost some things because of the hurricane, **but I still have...**





1. Write or draw a picture of some of the things you lost because of the hurricane. (If you did not lose anything, draw or write about things other people lost.)

2. What are some of the things you did not lose because of the hurricane? Draw or write about some of the things you still have. For example, you can write: "I may have lost some things because of the hurricane, but I still have...."



## Staying Safe After A Hurricane

Danger from a hurricane doesn't end when the wind dies down. In fact, many injuries and even deaths occur after a storm has passed. Children, in particular, are at a high risk of getting injured after a storm. With flood waters covering up holes and other hazards, fallen trees and power lines, dangerous debris scattered on the ground, wild animals and scared pets wandering around, and a number of other potentially harmful situations, children can easily get hurt.

While accidents can happen, the risk of serious injury may be greatly reduced with just a few simple actions. Here are some ideas:

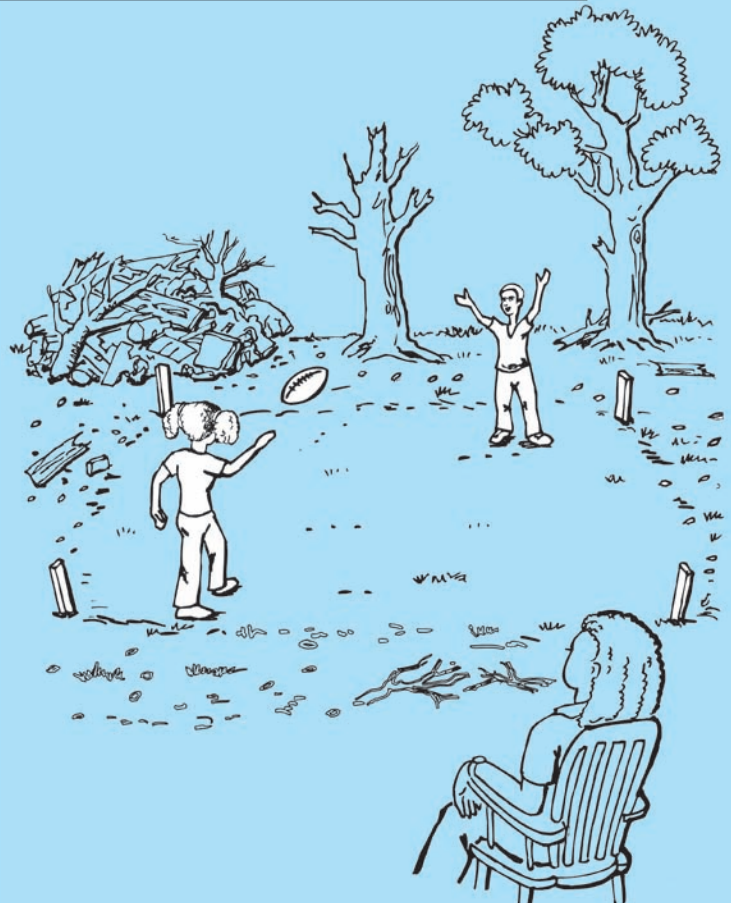
1. Talk to your child about some of the dangers he or she may face after a hurricane (review the common hazards listed on the next page with your child).
2. Clear your house of any potential dangers before letting your child inside (e.g., test all balcony railings and electrical outlets, remove leaking chemicals, clean up broken glass, etc.).
3. Locate and clear "safe areas" where your child can play outside (See Adult Activity below.).
4. Make sure a responsible adult is supervising your child at all times.
5. Never let your child play in floodwaters or outside after dark.

For more information on keeping you and your family safe after a hurricane, check out the "Prevent Illness and Injury After A Disaster" page on the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) website at: <https://www.cdc.gov/disasters/illness-injury.html>.

### **Adult Activity: Create A "Safe Zone" For Your Child**

After being inside for days, children are often eager to go out and play. If you live in a neighborhood that was affected by a hurricane, there may be lots of dangerous debris and other hazards around your home. To protect your child from injury, it will help to create a "safe zone" where he or she can play safely.

Choose a small area suitable for your child to play in. Make sure there are no power lines, floodwaters, or dangerous objects or debris nearby. Go through the area carefully and remove any debris that could hurt your child. Then, mark the edges of the play area with ribbons or some other visible markers (if possible). Before letting your child play, walk your child through the play area and its boundaries. Always be sure to have an adult supervise your child at all times.







## Staying Safe After A Hurricane

A hurricane is a dangerous storm. Its high winds and water can cause a lot of damage. While people can get hurt during a hurricane, many people also get hurt after a hurricane because of all the damage the storm caused. You have to be very careful after a hurricane so that you don't get hurt. Here are some ways you can stay safe.

### Do's And Don'ts For Staying Safe After A Hurricane

#### DO:

- Stay away from fallen power lines and any objects touching power lines.
- Watch where you walk, sit, and place your hands. You could trip over storm debris or cut yourself on broken glass, nails, or other sharp objects.
- Be very careful when crossing a street. If traffic lights don't work or stop signs are down, cars may not stop like they normally would.
- Stay out of debris piles, abandoned homes, and damaged buildings.
- Drink only bottled water until your water is safe to drink.

#### DON'T:

- Play in floodwaters or puddles. The water may be dirty and could make you very sick or give you an electric shock.
- Touch any wild animals or stray pets. They may be scared or hurt and could bite.
- Play outside after dark.

In the picture below, circle all the things that can hurt you. Remember to stay away from these things if you see them after a hurricane.





## Family Hurricane Plan

A disaster is a large-scale event that can cause great destruction and death. Some disasters are caused by forces of nature that cannot be controlled. These are known as natural disasters. A natural disaster can be caused by an event such as a hurricane, tornado, flood, or earthquake. Some disasters are human-made, but can be just as destructive as a natural disaster, such as the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Many disasters happen with little or no warning. Having a family disaster plan can save your family's life and may help your child cope with fears or worries he or she may have about safety or getting separated during a disaster.

**Create a family hurricane preparedness plan.** First, obtain information on how to prepare for a hurricane in your area. You can do this by contacting your local emergency management office or visit the "Hurricane Preparedness-Be Ready" page on the National Hurricane Center's website at: [www.nhc.noaa.gov/prepare/ready.php](http://www.nhc.noaa.gov/prepare/ready.php). Once you obtained this information, hold a family meeting and develop your family's hurricane plan. Make sure that everyone knows *what to do*, *where to go*, and *who to call* in the event a hurricane occurs. Practice or review your plan every six months or at the beginning of each hurricane season.

When creating your plan, identify hurricane evacuation routes and places your family can go to if you are told to evacuate (such as a public shelter, hotel or a friend's or relative's house). Keep in mind that sometimes it is better to move only a few miles inland than to evacuate to another city further away. If a family member has special needs, it is important to contact your local emergency management office before the hurricane season starts to let authorities know your family might need assistance if an evacuation is ordered for your area.

As part of your plan, choose a responsible out-of-area relative or friend as a point of contact for your family in case you get separated. Make sure everyone knows at least two ways to contact that person (e.g., telephone, mailing address, email). If a family member has special needs, it is important to contact your local emergency management office before a disaster occurs to let authorities know your family might need assistance. And don't forget to plan for your pets as well. If you evacuate to a public shelter, you may not be able to bring your pet.

**Create a disaster supply kit.** Store these items in a dry, accessible place. Make sure you have enough supplies to last at least five to seven days. For a checklist of hurricane supplies, visit the National Hurricane Survival Initiative's website at: <http://hurricanesafety.org/prepare/hurricane-safety-checklists/>.

### **Disaster Supply Kit Checklist**

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Flashlight (1 per person) | <input type="checkbox"/> Cash                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Pet care items          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Extra batteries           | <input type="checkbox"/> Radio (battery operated) | <input type="checkbox"/> Toys, books, games      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> First aid kit             | <input type="checkbox"/> Non-perishable food      | <input type="checkbox"/> Moisture wipes          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Extra medication          | <input type="checkbox"/> Blankets, pillows        | <input type="checkbox"/> Toiletries, towels      |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Water (1g/person/day)     | <input type="checkbox"/> Extra set of keys        | <input type="checkbox"/> Important documents     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Portable Charger (USB)    | <input type="checkbox"/> Cards or board game      | <input type="checkbox"/> Child's "comfort items" |

### **JOINT ACTIVITY: Add Children's Items To Your Disaster Supply Kit**

It is a good idea to add a few items to your disaster supply kit specifically for your child. In the event your family does evacuate, your child will need things to keep him or her occupied, such as books, games, or toys. The activity on the next page will help your child identify items they would like to have in their disaster kit. If possible, add these items to your kit. This will give your child some sense of comfort and control.



## Be Disaster Ready

A disaster is an event that can cause a lot of damage and hurt many people. Because a disaster can happen quickly, it is important that you know ahead of time what to do in case a disaster happens in your area. To stay safe during an emergency or disaster, you will need to act quickly and know your family's disaster plan.

The first thing to remember during an emergency is to always follow directions given by your parents, school, or local police or fire department. They will tell you where to go and what to do so that you, your family, and friends will be as safe as possible. If you have to leave your house or school, go to a place you have previously chosen to meet at. If you cannot get there safely, stay calm and go to a place you are familiar with and ask a police officer or other adult for help.

If you happen to get separated from your family or classmates, do not panic. Try to find a phone and call your family. If you cannot reach your family, call a friend or relative that your family has chosen in case of an emergency and let them know where you are. You can also call 9-1-1 for help. Sometimes you may not be able to find a phone or call your family immediately. This is okay. It is important that you are safe first. You will be able to call your family as soon as possible.

### What Would You Bring?

If you were permitted to put two things in your family's disaster supply kit, what would you select and why? List or draw these things below.

Item 1	Item 2

Fill out the emergency card below with help from your family and carry a copy with you. This way, you will have a copy with you in case of an emergency.

#### **Emergency Contact Card**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian: \_\_\_\_\_

Hm: \_\_\_\_\_ Wk: \_\_\_\_\_ Cell: \_\_\_\_\_

Emergency Meeting Place: \_\_\_\_\_

Outside of Area Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_



## Some Common Questions And Answers

### My child is worried about another hurricane. What should I say?

Children who have experienced a previous hurricane or other traumatic event may be especially worried or scared about another hurricane (or even a bad storm) that is approaching. Children are often comforted by hearing that family members love them and will do everything they can to keep them safe. You should be honest with your child about the approach of another hurricane, but also be reassuring. Tell your child something like this:

*“Being scared of another hurricane is normal. Many people are nervous because another hurricane may happen. However, everyone is working very hard to keep you, your family, and your friends safe. People at the National Hurricane Center and people at the fire and police departments are all working together to help us stay safe. If another hurricane looks like it will come in our area, we will have plenty of time to get ready for it.”*

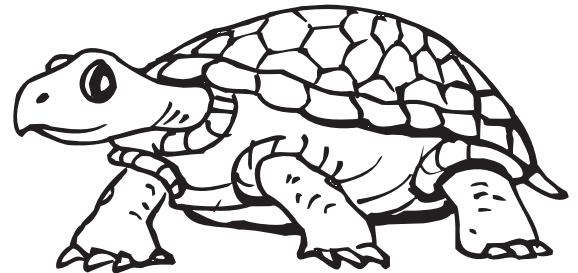
(Adapted from the National Association of School Psychologists)

### How can I teach my child to relax?

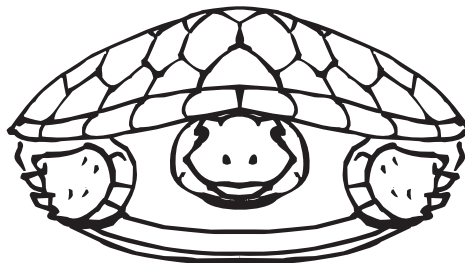
**Use the Turtle Technique:** Talk to your child about what turtles do when they feel scared. Tell your child that turtles go into their shells to calm down. Say that he or she can also create a shell to relax in when feeling mad, scared, or stressed. Your child can create a shell by doing any of the following: putting his or her head down, going to a quiet corner or a separate room, or just closing his or her eyes.

Once your child is in his or her shell, it is important to relax. Here are some things that can help:

- 1) Sit in a comfortable position, with feet flat on the floor.
- 2) Take a couple of deep breaths; feel your stomach go in and out like a balloon.
- 3) Count to 10 or 20 very slowly.
- 4) Imagine something you really enjoy, such as sitting on the beach in the sun, floating on water, or some other calm image.
- 5) Remind your child that he or she can practice this before going to sleep or when nervous or scared.



Note: It's also important for parents to relax! Try to “take a break” from feeling tense and worried, by doing the turtle activity with your child. Or, find a quiet place - even if it's only for a few minutes each day - and follow the breathing and relaxation instructions above.



### *My family had to move because of the storm. How can I help my child?*

The same strategies that help most children after a traumatic event (see Pages 18-25) will be helpful for children and families who have to move because of a hurricane. Here are some additional tips that may be helpful:

- Enroll your child in school as soon as possible, so that they don't miss out on important learning activities. School attendance also helps to normalize children's daily routine, provides an opportunity for making new friends, and occupies children with productive activities. If your child enrolls in a new school, ask the teacher to assign a "big brother or sister" in the classroom to help your child's transition to this new setting.
- Children miss their friends. If you have contact information for "friends from home," encourage your child to communicate with them (email, call, text, etc.). If contact information is not available, have your child keep a diary or take pictures to share with their friends when they see them next.
- Try to make the best of a difficult situation. Treat the relocation as an "adventure." Have your child keep a "travel log" or journal. They can name their journal "My Adventures Since The Hurricane." Your child could keep track of daily activities, draw pictures, or insert photos to capture the adventure for future storytelling.
- Try to do one fun family activity each day, even if it is just for 15 minutes. This will provide a needed distraction from the challenges everyone in the family is facing.

### *How can I tell when to seek professional help for my child?*

It is a good idea to seek the help of a mental health professional when either:

- Your child has a number of stress reactions (see Page 12) that don't seem to be getting better or going away after a few months.

OR

- Your child is so bothered by the hurricane or related events that he or she is having a very hard time in school, at home, or with friends.

\* This advice applies to adults as well. If your stress reactions do not improve or interfere with your everyday life, you should seek professional help.

### *Where can I obtain professional help for my child or another family member?*

If you or your child needs emergency help right away, call **9-1-1** or check the government listings of your local phone book for "mental health crisis hotlines." The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline number is 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255).

For non-emergencies, you can find a psychologist via the American Psychological Association's website at <http://locator.apa.org/> or contact **2-1-1** for a referral. If the 2-1-1 service is not available in your area, try contacting your local mental health association or ask your child's doctor for a referral.

## **Greater Houston Area Resources**

### **The Emotional Backpack Project Toolkits for parents, teachers and youth**

These toolkits provide easy access to information, books, activities, etc. to talk about mental health, to work on their own challenges, and to connect to services in the Houston region.

[www.mhahouston.org/the-emotional-backpack-project](http://www.mhahouston.org/the-emotional-backpack-project)

(713) 523-8963

### **United Way of Greater Houston Helpline**

Whether you need help finding mental health support, food stamps, or a haven from domestic violence, 2-1-1 is the number to call when you don't know who to call. Trained specialists provide information and referrals drawn from a comprehensive database of social services.

Dial 2-1-1

### **The Trauma and Grief Center at Texas Children's Hospital**

The Trauma and Grief Center provides evidence-based assessment and interventions for youth who have experienced traumas and/or losses.

<https://www.texaschildrens.org/departments/trauma-and-grief-center>

(832) 822-3829

### **The Harris Center for Mental Health and IDD**

The Harris Center provides assessment, counseling, case management, psychiatric services, skills training, and school-based programs for those living with mental illness in Harris County.

[www.mhmraharris.org](http://www.mhmraharris.org)

(713) 970-7000

### **Depelchin Children's Center**

Depelchin provides foster care and adoption services, community-based counseling for Harris county families, trauma treatment, and parenting education.

[www.depelchin.org](http://www.depelchin.org)

(713) 730-2335

### **Family Houston**

Family Houston provides case management, counseling, employment and financial services, veterans' services, substance abuse prevention and transition services for youth.

[www.familyhouston.org](http://www.familyhouston.org)

(713) 861-4849

### **Jewish Family Services (open to everyone, regardless of religion)**

Jewish Family Services provides counseling for children, adolescents, and families.

<http://www.jfshouston.org>

(713) 667-9336

**For more information on Dr. La Greca's research on children and disasters, please visit:**

[https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Annette\\_La\\_Greca](https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Annette_La_Greca)







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