



TALKING TO CHILDREN AFTER THE JAPANESE EARTHQUAKE AND TSUNAMI

For Parents

How to talk with your children can at times be difficult when you are also feeling concern, worry or not yourself. Below are some guidelines for talking with your children about the tsunami tragedy.

- **Reassure your children that they are safe** and that you will take care of them as will others who care for them, e.g., teachers in school, policemen, friends and neighbors, babysitters.
- **Make time to talk and listen** to your children even if you are feeling stressed. Provide ongoing opportunities for children to talk about the disaster. They might have more questions as time goes on.
- **Encourage your children to ask questions** - Listen to what they say. Be honest. Tell them what you know and what you don't know in simple language they can understand.
- **Talk on their level** – Younger children should be given less information. Older children and teens will want to know more details.
- **Provide comfort and assurance that address your child's specific fears** - Make sure children understand it's OK to talk about fears and that it may take a little time to overcome fears.
- **Encourage your children to express their feelings and concerns** - Give your children permission to tell you what is wrong and what they are feeling. Accept your children's feelings and concerns. Help children understand that there are no bad emotions and that a wide range of reactions is normal.
- **Maintain family routines and rituals** – story telling, cuddling at bedtime, nursery rhymes, family dinners, church, outings, gathering with friends, doing the usual household chores.
- **Encourage activities** – drawing pictures, riding bike, exercise, asking child what activities he/she might enjoy. Realize that they may feel afraid to go outside alone.
- **Let children help** make decisions – “what book to read”, “what movie to see”, “what is good to eat”
- **Help your children relax** – label physical symptoms – let them know that stress/fears about what happened where they live is normal. Help them find an activity that is calming and do it with them.

- **Take care of yourself** - Do something relaxing. Take a few deep breaths, count to 10 or take a walk.
- **Ask others for help** - Ask trusted friends, family members and other parents for help if you feel overwhelmed.
- **Monitor children's television watching and internet access** - You may wish to limit their exposure to graphic or troubling scenes. Watch reports of the evolving events with your children. These are times questions might arise.
- **Be alert to changes in your child's usual behavior** - Younger children may experience: bedwetting, clinging and crying, nightmares, stomachaches, fear. Older children may experience: Fighting and other aggressive behaviors, withdrawal from peers and family, difficulty concentrating, change in school performance, weight change, fatigue.

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