



## Tips for Talking to Children about Disaster

*Grade Level: 3<sup>d</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup>*

When it comes to planning for emergencies, it's important to make sure the entire family is prepared – especially children. Although some adults find disaster readiness a difficult topic to discuss with children, knowing what to do in an emergency will help them face any threats in a calmer, more capable manner.

Whether a child has personally experienced trauma or has seen or heard about an event, it is important for parents to be informed and ready to help. Adults should discuss with children what emergencies might occur and what actions the family would take to protect itself. Youth should also be given age-appropriate roles in carrying out the emergency plan.

Here are some tips on how to talk to kids before or after a disaster occurs.

- Provide your children with opportunities to talk about what they are seeing on television or in real life. Allow them to ask questions and be prepared to answer honestly and at a level they will understand. Here are some topics you could cover.
  - What do you think happened?
  - Do you know what types of emergency workers are here to help people who have been hurt?
  - Have you memorized our home address and phone number?
  - Which relative or person would you call if you could not reach us?
  - Where would you want to meet if the family was separated?
- If a tragic event has taken place, don't dwell on the frightening details. Instead, help children identify good things, such as heroic actions, families who unite and share support and the assistance offered by people throughout a community.
- Take the opportunity to compile an emergency kit of supplies and establish a family communications plan together. If your kids help to create a plan, they will be more likely to remember it when the time comes to implement it. Be sure to make practice visits to your family meeting place, and practice calls to your emergency contact relatives, so children will feel comfortable doing so when the time comes.
- Monitor media usage to avoid having your kids see repeated images of trouble events like a natural or manmade disaster.
- Children like consistency, so maintain normal daily activities as much as possible.

- Help them understand there are no bad emotions and that a wide range of reactions is normal. Encourage them to express their feelings through conversation or art.
- If your children have been directly affected by an emergency, help them find ways to feel useful, such as participating in chores around the house, neighborhood or school.

Remember, the lessons you teach your kids today could contribute significantly to their safety and well-being in the case of an emergency.