

Disasters and Their Effects

What is a disaster?

A disaster is a devastating, catastrophic event that can be life threatening and/or injury producing, which may create the following distressful experiences:

Potential experiences or feelings:

- Sense of fear, worry
- Disruption of home, routine, etc.
- Feeling that one's life was threatened
- Witnessing injuries, death, pain
- Feeling trapped and isolated
- Being out of control of something threatening to life's basics: food, shelter, clothing, people, comfort...even life itself
- Having flashbacks of other catastrophes
- Feeling cut-off from services
- Being separated from loved ones
- Having a sense of mortality
- Feeling "survivor guilt"
- Children who are forced to become "parents" to adults who are scared or worried

Symptoms of Distress in Children

As a result of traumatic experiences some children will show a variety of symptoms of distress. The teacher must first know a child's baseline ("usual") behavior and cultural/ethnic responses before he/she can identify "unusual" or problem behavior in a child.

Symptoms:

- Any unusual complaints of illness
- Keeping isolated from the rest of the group
- Child seems so pressured, anxious that he/she somehow dominates, has to distract others, or is otherwise in need of attention
- Changed behavior/appearance
- Resistant to opening up (however, child might just be shy, may have language or cultural barrier)
- No eye contact
- Difficulty concentrating, can't focus
- "Feisty" or hyperactive/silly, giddy
- Any emotional display; crying, "regressed" behavior (less than age-appropriate)
- Lack of emotional expression
- Poor performance
- Can't tolerate change; can't move to next task
- Lethargic, apathetic
- Easily startled, jumpy