

Children and Tragedy

Tragedy may strike quickly and without warning. These events can be frightening for adults, but they are traumatic for children if they don't know what to do. Children may become anxious, confused, or frightened. It is important to give children guidance that will help them reduce their fears in the wake of a traumatic event.

Children and Their Response to Disaster¹

Children depend on daily routines. They wake up, eat breakfast, go to school, and play with friends. When emergencies or disasters interrupt this routine, children may become anxious. In a disaster, they'll look to you and other adults for help. How you react to tragic events gives them clues on how to act. If you react with alarm, a child may become more scared.

Feelings of fear are healthy and natural for adults and children. But as an adult, you need to keep control of the situation. Concentrate on your child's emotional needs by asking the child what's uppermost in his or her mind. Your response during this time may have a lasting impact.

Be aware that following a tragic incident, children are most afraid that:

- The event will happen again
- Someone will be injured or killed
- They will be separated from the family
- They will be left alone

Helping Children Recover from a Disaster

Keep the family together. Keep the family together as much as possible and make children a part of what you are doing to get the family back on its feet.

Calmly and firmly explain the situation. As best as you can, tell children what you know about the disaster and what efforts are being undertaken in the wake of the events.

Encourage children to talk. Let children talk about the tragedy and ask questions as much as they want. Encourage children to describe what they're feeling. Listen to what they say. If possible, include the entire family in the discussion.

Resources Are Available

Additional information, self-help tools and other resources are available online at www.MagellanHealth.com. Or call us for more information, help and support. Counselors are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week to provide confidential assistance at no cost to you.

¹ Adapted from the Los Angeles City Fire Department at www.lafd.org/egindex.htm.