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ZERO TO THREE
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Shelter From the Storm

A Parent Guide

Contact:



ZERO TO THREE is a national, nonprofit organization established in 1977 that provides parents, professionals, and policymakers the knowledge and know-how to nurture early development. Our mission is to ensure that all babies and toddlers have a strong start in life.
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Save the Children invests in childhood—every day, in times of crisis and for our future. In the United States and around the world, we give children a healthy start, the opportunity to learn, and protection from harm. By transforming children’s lives now, we change the course of their future and ours.
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Contents



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Welcome	2
Part One: When Disaster Strikes	4
• Ask Yourself, “What Is My Child’s Behavior Telling Me?”	4
Part Two: After a Disaster	6
• Focus on You.....	7
• Seeking Help.....	8
• Ask Yourself, “What Is My Child’s Behavior Telling Me?”	9
• Share the Story.....	12
Closing Thoughts	12
Acknowledgments	13

Welcome

Do you know?

Trust builds between you and your baby when you respond to his needs, are affectionate and nurturing, help him feel safe, and share the joys of talking, singing, reading, and playing together.

Dear Parents,

Day in and day out, as you play peek-a-boo, sing a silly song, comfort your infant when she is upset, and talk about what you are doing as you change your toddler's diaper, the love and trust between you deepens. Your relationship gives your child a sense of order, safety, and security. It also serves to buffer her from stress. This can help smooth the way during everyday ups and downs—and if and when the winds pick up and the going gets rough.

Even the youngest children are affected by scary events such as natural disasters. For a baby or toddler, a disaster might mean a sudden change in daily routines, relocating suddenly to a new place, drinking from a different bottle or cup, and noticing the tension in the voices and arms of the person holding him.

It can be tempting to think, "Oh, they're too young to remember—they won't be affected by what's happening." Actually, even though young children may not understand what they see or hear, they are taking everything in and trying to make sense of what they are experiencing. Parents, and other important caregivers, play a critical role in helping to shape how children perceive the world around them. In fact, young children are "amazingly tuned into the behaviors and emotions of the significant caregivers in their lives including parents, grandparents, relatives, teachers, and other adults" (Osofsky, 2007, p. 4).

Young children remember early relationships and experiences in their bodies and minds even before they have words to talk about what is happening. Early memories help shape children's views of themselves and others.

Research on parent-child attachment over the past 60 years supports the understanding that consistent, sensitive,

and responsive caregiving early in life sets a pattern for young children's optimal expectations of people in the future (Dykas & Cassidy, 2011). Those experiences can serve as a buffer to protect children from scary, traumatic experiences, such as natural disasters, or leave them vulnerable, with fewer ways to cope.

Although no one can prevent these stressors in a child's life, rest assured that you can provide your children the emotional support they need to help them to cope and recover. This may sound like a lot to think about at a time when you have so much to deal with—especially if you are dealing with the memories of a previous event.

Yet, in many ways you already support your child. Your baby or toddler pays careful attention to what you do—and how you do it. As you handle everyday problems and interact with family members, friends, and others, your child is learning coping skills for life that include the importance of community, self-care, perseverance, sharing feelings, accepting help, helping others, and laughing.

We invite you to take a moment to appreciate that so much of what you do every day makes your relationship with your child even stronger—giving your child a sense of confidence to help deal with life's upsets, recover, move forward, and thrive!

We hope that you will find the information in these pages helpful. We invite you to discuss points that are especially meaningful to you with family members, friends who are parents, and your child's early care and education provider(s). While no one can prevent a natural disaster, having some basic information and knowing you are not alone can help you to feel more sure of yourself as you support your child and family in recovering from a disaster.

Do you know?

The little things you say and do each day make a big difference in your child's life.

When your child is upset that you have to go to work and you are calm and explain you will be back like always, you are teaching her "everything will be OK."

When you help her solve a problem: "Let's use this ruler to get your ball that rolled under the sofa", you are teaching her that you are there to help her. Also that she is competent and can manage.

Part One:

When Disaster Strikes



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When alarms are ringing, the electricity goes out, and the unexpected occurs, it's your sensitive, responsive care that feels steadying to your child.

This is where all the everyday interactions you share with your child, and the love and trust between you, pay off. This is where knowing and trying to understand what your child is telling you can help you to figure out how to be the most supportive to your child.

Ask Yourself, "What Is My Child's Behavior Telling Me?"

Understanding your child's behavior can help you to decide how to respond to best meet her needs. Because very young children communicate through their actions rather than words, being attentive to their behavior is critical.

Do you know?

Babies and toddlers tell us what they feel, think, and need through their behavior. By trying to "read" their behavior from the outside, we can begin to understand what might be happening on the inside.

When I...	I may be saying...	How you can support me
<p>Cry, cling, hit or kick, or get quiet and still.</p>	<p>I am worried or afraid. Something is going on and it does not feel right.</p>	<p>Offer me simple, clear words for what is happening: "We are waiting for the tornado to pass."</p> <p>Smile. Offer me a hug. Reassure me: "We are here together and safe now."</p> <p>Distract me. Let's sing a song we always sing together. Or tell me a story.</p> <p>Set clear and firm limits in gentle and loving ways, and do not allow me to harm myself or others.</p>
<p>Stare, look wide-eyed, cling, suck my thumb.</p>	<p>I'm confused. Overwhelmed.</p>	<p>Tell me simply and honestly what is happening: "We are here in the closet. I know it is dark, but we are together and safe."</p> <p>Give me my "lovey" or "snuggly" if we have it with us. Allow me to sit in your lap.</p> <p>Give me a sense of control. Let me squeeze my stuffed toy that lights up.</p>
<p>Fuss, act silly, and bounce around, ask lots of questions</p>	<p>I may be hungry, tired, or afraid. In need of reassurance because I feel out of sorts.</p>	<p>Offer me something to eat or drink if you can. Or a space to sleep.</p> <p>Try to help me feel a sense of routine. Explain: "Even though we are in a different place, it is snack time/naptime."</p> <p>Give me something to do with my energy that is safe. For example, do big stretches together, blow bubbles, or give me a deep back rub to help me feel calm again.</p>

Part Two:

After a Disaster



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Long after the winds and rains stop, and the sun begins to shine, you might find that it is taking time for you, your child, or both of you to recover. Sometimes this is how it works. Be kind to yourself and your family as you get your feet back on the ground.

Here are three ways you can support your baby or toddler—and your family—during this time:

- **Focus on you.** Being aware of what you are feeling and taking steps to make life as easy and manageable as possible will help you to tune in to and respond to your child's feelings and needs.
- **Ask yourself,** "What is my child's behavior telling me?" Trying to understand the feelings and needs behind your child's behavior will give you the information you need to decide how best to respond.
- **Share the story.** It may not be easy because words can stir up feelings that you may not want to deal with right now. At the same time, when you can figure out a simple, clear, and honest way to talk with your infant or toddler, you show him that you can talk about anything and everything together.

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Focus on You

There is so much going on during a disaster. You may feel fatigued and, at the same time, feel that you can't rest because there is so much to do. Having regular routines—for things such as sit-down meals, hot showers, and exercise—may seem like a waste of time. In reality, these replenishing routines give you the energy to accomplish the things you need to do. Time to play and relax in the midst of the hectic efforts to regroup and resettle can be grounding for you and your family. It is good to give your mind and body a break from feeling stressed.

It's common for parents to experience the following feelings or emotions after an event:

Forgetfulness
Fogginess, numbness
Driven and focused
Sadness, grief, loss
Lack of motivation
Preoccupation with the event, avoidance
of talking about the event
Irritability
Anger
Distractibility, trouble concentrating,
focusing on small, doable tasks
Worry, anxiety
Sensitivity
Nervousness
"Jumpy"
Racing thoughts
Feelings of guilt
Somatic symptoms such as headaches,
stomachaches, difficulty sleeping or
sleeping too much

If you're experiencing emotions that feel concerning, or you need a way to express yourself, here are some common strategies that may be of help. Remember, everyone experiences adversity differently, so your response should be tailored to your needs.

Strategy	
Self-talk or talking aloud	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Get outside of your emotions by narrating what you are doing or are going to do. • Encourage yourself and others!
Get perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Remember that you are all human and this was a big event. It makes sense to not feel like yourself for a while. • It is normal to have an emotional reaction. • It is important to take care of yourself. In fact, taking care of yourself helps give you the energy to take care of your family. • If the feelings don't pass, or are affecting your functioning after some time has passed, it may be time to talk to a mental health professional.
Routines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing what to expect when you are coping with big emotions can help to keep you, other adults, and the children calm. • You may need to set new daily routines based on your location. • Write down your new routine and post it on the wall, or keep it in your pocket. • Respect others' routines around you.
Keep an organized environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowing where to find items and having an orderly environment can make you and others feel calmer. • If you are in new surroundings, decide where things will go and label those spots. • Pick up and organize your space throughout the day.
Minimize loud noises and sudden movements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • After an event, loud noises and sudden movements may make you feel jumpy. • Speak in calm tones. • Move slowly and deliberately.
Stay in the present moment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is easy to feel overwhelmed by your feelings after an event. • If you find your mind wandering, bring it back to the present moment. • Use simple exercises to bring yourself back into the present moment. For example, pick a color and identify 10 things that are that color, which you can see from where you are. • Focus on just accomplishing a few key things each day and then rest.

Seeking Help

Sometimes no matter how good your coping skills are, or how hard you try, you may need more support. If your feelings are getting in the way of your work and family life, it may be time to reach out for professional support.

Ask Yourself, “What Is My Child’s Behavior Telling Me?”

Very young children express themselves through behavior rather than language. Trying to understand what your child’s behavior is telling you will give you information to decide how you might want to respond. Here are some examples in a young child’s words.

When I...	I may be saying...	How you can support me
Cry, fuss, cling, withdraw, or get quiet and still.	Things still don’t feel right.	<p>Cuddle and hug me. I need extra loving to help me feel safe and secure when things are so uncertain.</p> <p>Offer me safe ways to express feelings, such as drawing, pretend play, or telling stories.</p>
Stay still. Show no interest in playing or talking with you or anyone.	I feel overwhelmed.	<p>Allow me some quiet time and then join me with a quiet activity.</p> <p>Stay near me so I know you are there. I will choose to come to you when I am ready.</p> <p>Arrange for me to play with one quiet child at a time to ease me back into interacting when I am ready. Stay near me when you do this so I know everything is ok.</p>
Cling, scream, and cry when you leave me—even to go into another room.	I still don’t feel safe.	<p>Try not to leave me often. Tell me where you are going and when you are coming back. Try to keep your word and be on time. Call if you are going to be late.</p> <p>Please don’t sneak off when you need to go somewhere; I may cry, but it is better if you tell me.</p> <p>If you can’t be with me, try to leave me with caregivers who I am familiar and comfortable with. Leave something of yours with me to hold on to while you are gone, so I know you are coming back.</p> <p>If I want to be held, please hold me. It helps me to know you are there and that I can have you when I need you.</p>



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When I...	I may be saying...	How you can support me
		<p>Know that this will not last forever, and what you say and do today is going to help me move forward when it is time.</p>
<p>Want everything to be done “my way.”</p>	<p>I want to feel in control of something.</p>	<p>When you are patient and calm, I feel safe. I need your help to regain a sense of control, by knowing that you are in control. When you are calm and help me to become calm, I am learning important skills.</p> <p>Give me limited choices when I can have them. For example, “Would you like to wear your purple pajamas or your green and yellow ones?” Or “Would you like to skip or hop to bed?” Or “Would you like green beans or apple slices with dinner?”</p>
<p>Talk about friends who no longer live near, too.</p>	<p>I miss our old life.</p>	<p>Talk about them with me and about how much you miss them, too. Give me a sense of hope that old friends are still here and hopefully we can stay in touch with those who have moved.</p> <p>If you can, call old friends so that I can hear their voices.</p>
<p>Am more aggressive—I may hit, kick, or bite you or other people.</p>	<p>I am just so mad about all these changes!</p>	<p>Set firm limits about not hurting others, but voice my frustrations and give me hugs and warm support. It helps me to know that you understand that I am upset and that things will get better.</p>

When I...	I may be saying...	How you can support me
Don't want to eat. Or have trouble sleeping.	I am still so confused. My anxiety makes eating or sleeping hard at times.	<p>Be patient. Reassure me that you will stay with me while I sleep.</p> <p>Try to get me to have little snacks (such as string cheese, grapes, apple slices) throughout the day to keep up my energy.</p> <p>Eat with me.</p>
Act out scary events in my play.	I need to understand what happened.	<p>Let me play. Join in. Acting out frightening events helps me understand and cope.</p> <p>Put words to my play to show me that you understand what I am telling you.</p>
Return to earlier behaviors, such as thumb sucking and wetting my pants.	I feel like I need to be cared for right now as I am anxious.	<p>Honor self-soothing behaviors following crises and use language and behaviors that support children's efforts to cope so they can get back on track.</p> <p>For example, say: "It's OK, we have other jeans to change into; we can work on this together."</p> <p>Remember, this will not last forever. Try not to get too frustrated with me.</p>
Am happy, singing, playing. Gaze in your eyes, smile, reach for you, give you a hug, or run into your arms.	I can still feel joyful and I need you to delight with me.	Laughing and being silly together is fun—and can help us both feel calm. Let's enjoy being together like we did before the disaster so I know your love is still the same and you are still available for me.

Share the Story

Talking about certain events can be a challenge for adults. How can a life-changing disaster be placed into words? You might worry that even if you can find the words, thinking and saying them may bring back disturbing feelings and memories for your child. Yet, your child remembers that something happened and is looking to you to help understand the event. While there is no one perfect way to explain to your child what happened, what you *can* do is think ahead about what might be comforting for your child to hear. Using clear, simple, and honest language can help your child to make sense of what he is experiencing.

It is important to remember to balance your explanations so they are honest, explanatory, and comforting, but not too graphic, so as not to frighten your child. Stick with the facts, but keep them general. Here are some examples to get you started:

- The wind was blowing and made a big noise. We went into the basement to be safe, and now we are here at Aunt June's house.
- We heard the sirens and we went to our safe place. Then we turned on the flashlights and had a snack. Now we are going to the shelter where we will be together and safe.
- It rained and rained. The firefighter came to get us and we took a ride in his boat. Now we are going to Grandma's house.
- The storm hurt some houses, but not ours. We get to go home today from the shelter. The other people will go home when their houses are fixed.

Closing Thoughts

Every day you keep your baby or toddler safe and protect her from harm through the decisions you make and by reacting in a calm manner. Your reactions to all events, big and small, let your child know whether or not she can feel safe and secure. During a disaster, your child will look to you, just as she does every day, to receive that same calm, reassurance.

These everyday interactions not only strengthen your relationship, they provide your child with confidence and a sense of competence that he will draw upon to manage situations—expected and not—throughout his life. Remember, you are capable—and you are not alone.

Do you know?

Talking with a young child about an experience helps the child understand and gain a sense of control.



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FEMA Disaster Preparedness Trainings
[http://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.
aspx?code=is-366](http://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=is-366)

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