

# Shelter From the Storm: Helping Your Child to Feel Safe

- Being in a shelter is a disruption to the comforting routine and predictability of home and child care.
- Predictability makes everyone, but especially young children, feel safe.
- The different noises, smells, people, and general environment may cause your child to feel unsafe.
- During and after a disaster, predictability can be in short supply. But you are there and because of the trusting, caring relationship you have established with your child, your presence is steadying and comforting.
- Your ability to remain calm and offer them comfort will make them feel safe.
- You make all the difference!

## TIPS

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- Nest! Arrange your personal space, such as your cots, to make your own space—knowing that there is a space that you've made your own can feel comforting for the whole family.
- Move your child so that she is facing you while holding, feeding, or playing with her.
- Use a soothing voice when speaking to your child.
- Move to a rhythm—rock, sway, or gently bounce while you sing a song to calm your child.
- Distract—tell stories, do finger play (e.g., Itsy Bitsy Spider), or sing favorite songs.
- If your child asks questions or make requests regarding being in the shelter, validate his feelings and give brief factual information, but not enough to alarm him. For example, if your child says, "I want to go home, Mommy.," you might reply, "I know! Me too, but tonight we are staying here together." Or "It's hard not to be at home, but tonight we will stay here together."
- Keep to your routines as much as you can—eating at a set time, then play, then nap, then more active play.
- Try to keep scary images of the disaster away. Television and newspaper photographs of the event can be upsetting, as it may bring back scary feelings, or your child may think the event is happening again. Keep your child away from these outlets as much as possible.
- Keep scary conversations away from children. If you need to have an adult conversation about losses from the event, have it away from your child. When with the children, walk away from other adults who are discussing those things.
- Your child does understand that things have changed or are different. Talk with your toddler about the event with simple and few words. End on a hopeful note. Example: "It's scary when a big tornado wind comes [or the ground shakes or a plane crashes]. Then it stops, and now we are getting help so we can feel safe again."
- Assure your child that you will be with her throughout.

**Remember:** Take care of yourself as well. Children, even very young children, can sense when you are upset. Try to stay calm. Don't be afraid to reach out for help. Allow a helper in the shelter to give you a break by playing near you or in a children's area. Or, if another adult family member is there with you, take turns giving each other breaks.

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