

Shelter From the Storm: Understanding and Supporting Your Child

- Events that bring us to a shelter are stressful for everyone, including very young children.
- Very young children communicate mainly through the way they act, or behave.
- During times of stress children may behave differently than they do in day-to-day life. For example, they may act in ways that remind you of when they were younger, or get very quiet, or loud.
- Use the table at right to help you to understand what your baby or toddler might be communicating so you can comfort and support him.

When I...	I may be saying...	How you can support me
Cry, cling, hit or kick, or get quiet and still.	I am worried or afraid. Something is going on.	Offer me simple, clear words for what is happening: "We are staying here tonight." Smile. Offer me a hug. Reassure me: "We are here together and safe now." Let's sing a song we always sing together. Or tell me a story. Set up or maintain a routine so I know what to expect, like reading stories before bedtime. Do not allow me to hurt myself or others. This will not help me feel better. Help me calm my body by holding me and talking to me soothingly about what is going on, how I am feeling, and what will happen next.
Stare, look wide-eyed, cling, suck my thumb, hide my face, or pretend to sleep.	I'm confused. Overwhelmed.	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." Give me my "lovey" or "snuggly" if we have it with us. Let me sit in your lap if I want and rub my head or back. Give me a sense of control. Let me squeeze my stuffed toy that lights up. Or give me a little flashlight.
Fuss, or move around a lot.	I may be hungry, tired, afraid, or confused.	Offer me something to eat or drink if you can. Or a space to sleep. Help to change my focus to something different by reading me a story, singing a song, or doing big stretches with me. Try to help me feel a sense of routine. Explain: "Even though we are in a different place, it is snack time/naptime."

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