

<https://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/school-return-after.html#print>

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Returning to School After an Emergency or Disaster

Tips to Help Your Students Cope

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Teachers and early care and education (ECE) providers have an important role to play in helping children both prepare for and recover after a public health emergency.

Public health emergencies and disasters affect millions of children worldwide each year. These emergencies and disasters include natural events (such as severe weather, earthquakes, fires, floods, and tsunamis) and man-made events (such as acts of terrorism). An emergency or disaster can be destructive to a child's physical environment, as well as affect their mental health. As a teacher or ECE provider, you are committed to keeping schools and ECE programs safe and supporting children and their families. If your students experience an emergency or disaster, there are steps you can take to help your students cope and recover.

How can I help my students cope and continue to support their recovery from a disaster?

- Talk to children about what happened in a way they can understand. Keep it simple and appropriate for each child's age. (Learn more about [common reactions](#) by age range)
- Provide children with opportunities to talk about what they went through or what they think about it. Encourage them to share concerns and ask questions. Younger children may draw pictures or may play with toys to express what they think and feel.
- Children react, in part, to what they see from the adults around them. When teachers deal with a disaster calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their students.
- Children who were directly exposed to a disaster can become upset again; behavior changes resulting from the event may be long lasting and can worsen or return if these children see or hear reminders of what happened. Be aware that that this could happen and know what resources are available at your school for children and families, should you need to report concerns to the appropriate people at your school.
- Proceeding with normal daily routines, such following familiar schedules when to eat and when to play, can help reduce stress. However, while recovering from disasters, children may have a hard time focusing on learning, they may need more time than usually to master new skills and concepts.

It is difficult to predict how some children will respond to disasters and traumatic events. Because parents, teachers, and other adults see children in different situations, it is important for them to work together to share information about how each child is coping after a traumatic event.

After a disaster, teachers and ECE providers may also be struggling with severe posttraumatic symptoms and personal losses. This might prevent them from effectively participating in post-disaster intervention for the children in their care. In this case, it is important that teachers and ECE providers take care of themselves first and seek help from a professional. CALL or TEXT Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Disaster Distress Hotline: 1-800-985-5990; People with deafness or hearing loss can use their preferred relay service to call 1-800-985-5990.

What are some resources that I can use in my classroom to help children cope?

- [Coping after a disaster activity pages](#) [PDF – 545 KB / 2 pages / For print only]: interactive booklet for younger children to learn about coping after a disaster.

Additional Resources

- [CDC: Information on COVID-19 and Schools and Child Care](#)

For more information about how to help children cope after a disaster:

- [CDC: Helping Children Cope in Emergencies](#)
- [CDC: Helping Your Child Cope with a Disaster](#)
- [American Red Cross: Disaster Relief and Recovery Services](#)
- [National Institute of Mental Health: Coping with Traumatic Events](#)
- [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#)

For resources about being prepared for an emergency in your classroom:

- [Easy as ABC](#) infographic: teaches three steps to protect children during emergencies in the school day.
- [Federal Emergency Management Agency: Coping with Disasters](#)

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