## Common Reactions by Age Group

### Infants to 2 Year Olds
- Infants may become more cranky. They may cry more than usual or want to be held and cuddled more.

### 3 to 6 Year Olds
- Preschool and kindergarten children may return to behaviors they have outgrown. For example, toilet accidents, bed-wetting or being frightened about being separated from their parents/caregivers. They may also have tantrums or a hard time sleeping.

### 7 to 10 Year Olds
- Older children may feel sad, mad, or afraid that the event will happen again. Peers may share false information; however, parents or caregivers can correct the misinformation. Older children may focus on the details of the event and want to talk about it all the time or not want to talk about it at all. They may have trouble concentrating.

### Preteens and Teenagers
- Some preteens and teenagers respond to trauma by acting out. This could include reckless driving and alcohol or drug use. Others may become afraid to leave the home. They may want to cut back on how much time they spend with their friends. They can feel overwhelmed by their intense emotions and feel unable to talk about them. Their emotions may lead to increased arguing and even fighting with siblings, parents/caregivers or other adults.

### Special Needs Children
- Children who have a physical, emotional or intellectual limitations may have stronger reactions to a threatened or actual disaster. They might have more intense distress, worry or anger that children without special needs. Children with special needs may need extra words of reassurance, more explanations about the event, and more comfort.

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If you or someone you know needs assistance please have them call us at 712-252-3871.

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**PROJECT RECOVERY IOWA**  
Department of Human Services  

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Helping Your Child Cope with Disaster

Regardless of your child's age, he or she may feel upset or have strong emotions after an emergency. Some children react right away, while others may show signs of difficulty much later. How a child reacts and the common signs of distress can vary according to the child's age, previous experiences and how the child typically copes with stress.

Disasters can leave children feeling frightened, confused and insecure. Whether a child has personally experienced trauma, has merely seen the event on television or has heard it discussed by adults, it is important for parents and teachers to be informed and ready to help if reactions to stress begin to occur.

Children react, in part, on what they see from the adults around them. When parents and caregivers deal with a disaster calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for their children. Parents can be more reassuring to others around them, especially children, if they are better prepared.

Children may respond to a disaster by demonstrating fears, sadness or behavioral problems. Some children who have only indirect contact with the disaster but witness it on television may develop distress.

The emotional impact of an emergency on a child depends on a child's characteristics and experiences, the social and economic circumstances of the family and community, and the availability of local resources. Not all children respond in the same ways. Some might have more severe, longer-lasting reactions. The factors below may affect a child's emotional response.

- Direct involvement with the emergency
- Previous traumatic or stressful event
- Separation from caregivers
- Physical injury
- How parents and caregivers respond
- Family resources
- Community resilience
- Relationships and communication among family members
- Repeated exposure to mass media coverage of the emergency and aftermath.
- Ongoing stress due to the change in familiar routines and living conditions

How to Reduce Stress Before, During and After a Disaster or Traumatic Event

Before
Talk to your children so that they know you are prepared to keep them safe.
Review safety plans before a disaster or emergency happens. Having a plan will increase your children's confidence and help give them a sense of control.

During
Stay Calm and reassure your children.
Talk to children about what is happening in a way that they can understand. Keep it simple and appropriate for each child's age.

After
Provide children with opportunities to talk about how they feel. Encourage them to ask questions.
Work with your children's teachers or caregivers to share information about how each child is coping after the event.