



What to do in the aftermath of a natural disaster to support families and reduce trauma

We know all school districts have different resources and crisis teams to assist after a natural disaster, but we also want to be a resource to you if you need additional support. Please do not hesitate to reach out to the staff member serving your district if we can assist in any way. Below are a few tips and resources we have compiled to help in communicating with and supporting students and families as they come back to school after the storms of the last week.

1. Of course, the first thing students and families need is to have their **immediate safety and basic needs addressed**. A few important links for addressing basic needs are provided at the end of this note.

To minimize the stress and trauma that follow a natural disaster, it is important to also address the emotional and psychological needs of children and families. Here are a few first steps to building the emotional support and safety that students need as they come back to school:

2. **Stability and order:** In the aftermath of chaos and danger, students need as much structure and predictability as possible to rebuild their sense of safety. They need to know that someone is in charge, has a plan for moving forward, and will take care of them.
3. **Community:** Connection to others, and the feeling of coming together to support one another, will also promote feelings of safety and empowerment, particularly when coupled with concrete actions to move forward (below). For volunteer opportunities, visit nvoad.org.
4. **Concrete actions:** Help students and families identify clear and concrete tasks to take small steps forward. When needs are overwhelming, help them break down tasks into small, manageable steps. Cooking, cleaning, caring for others, organizing materials, etc. can all help students and families to focus on immediate goals and regain control.
5. **Information on stress reactions and coping skills:** The handouts below provide specific information by age of child in both English and Spanish.
6. **Information and connection to services:** Help families to identify the community services available to assist them in the coming days or months, both for emotional and practical needs.

Resources on stress reactions and coping skills, and how to support children in the wake of a natural disaster:

- Psychological First Aid is a great resource created by the National Center for Child Traumatic Stress (NCTSN) – below are guides in English and Spanish that can be helpful for school staff and for parents:
 - https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources//pfa_for_schools_appendix_a.pdf



- https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources//pfa_field_operations_guide_appendix_e.pdf
- https://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/resources//pfa_field_operations_guide_appendix_e_sp.pdf
- An article with 10 tips to consider with talking to children about natural disasters with information from trauma experts at Duke University:
 - https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/how-to-talk-to-your-kids-about-natural-disasters_us_5b9993d6e4b0cf7b004669c6?0lt
- From the National Association of School Psychologists, a list of symptoms to look for and ways to provide support:
 - http://www.naspscenter.org/crisis_safety/coping.html
- From the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, tips on talking to kids broken down by age level:
 - <https://store.samhsa.gov/shin/content/KEN01-0093R/KEN01-0093R.pdf>

Resources for addressing basic needs:

- For a toll-free hotline to speak with a trained specialist, call 211. They can provide you information on shelters, evacuation routes, storm clean-up, volunteer needs, and locating food and water. The service is available 24/7.
- For road closures, call 511.
- For help finding fuel/gas, visit gasbuddy.com or download the app.
- For shelter locations, visit redcross.org or call 888-892-1162.
- To find or apply for assistance, visit disasterassistance.gov