



# HELPING YOUR CHILD HANDLE EMOTIONS AFTER HURRICANES

(TRAUMA, DISASTER, OR OTHER LOSS)

## FACILITATOR'S NOTES FOR ADULT WORKSHOP

*Because of the strong emotional responses and volatility of people involved in a catastrophe, it is advised that appropriate mental health personnel or counselors be available to work with participants during this workshop.*

### CORE CONCEPTS:

- Children need help learning how to handle their emotions, especially following a hurricane (or other loss, trauma or disaster).
- Children learn how to handle emotions from how you handle yours.
- Learning how to handle emotions can help a child throughout life.

### TARGET GROUPS:

Parents and Caregivers of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers who have suffered from hurricanes (or other loss, trauma or disaster)

### GOAL:

By helping children cope with what they are feeling, parents and caregivers will be able to provide children with a greater sense of security and emotional skills to use throughout life.

### OBJECTIVES:

By the end of the workshop, adult workshop participants will:

- understand that children may reflect the emotions of the parent or caregiver
- recognize how the child may respond to hurricanes or other loss, trauma or disaster
- identify their own and their child's emotions
- employ strategies to teach the child how to handle emotions and feel more secure.

### WORKSHOP STRUCTURE:

Length: 2 hrs.

- |   |               |
|---|---------------|
| 1. Opening and Ground Rules                 | 5 minutes     |
| 2. Introduction and Icebreaker              | 20-25 minutes |
| 3. Reaction to Loss                         | 15 minutes    |
| 4. What Is Your Child Feeling? Reading Cues | 15 minutes    |
| 5. How Children Learn to Handle Emotions    | 15 minutes    |
| 6. Emotional Coaching                       | 20 minutes    |
| 7. Other Things That You Can Do             | 10 minutes    |
| 8. Dealing with Tantrums                    | 10 minutes    |
| 9. Conclusion/Questions                     | 5 minutes     |



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Louisiana Public Broadcasting • 7733 Perkins Rd • Baton Rouge, LA 70810 • 225.767.5660 • 800.272.8161 • [www.lpb.org](http://www.lpb.org) • [edserv@lpb.org](mailto:edserv@lpb.org)

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### **BEFORE THE WORKSHOP:**

Prior to the workshop – workshop staff will receive handouts preparing them possible situations that may occur and what they are to do. (See Ground Rules in the children’s workshop.)

- Review the workshop outline and content
- Review the background material and video clips.
- Set up the video player and discs/tapes
- Prepare the workshop packets (handouts)
- Assemble materials for workshop:
  - o flip chart with markers
  - o monitor, VCR/DVD player
  - o video clips—“Hurricane on Sesame Street,” Parenting Counts videos: “Morning Madness,” “Rough Day,” “Book of Jenny,” “Emotion Coaching: Parenting Styles & Five Steps of Emotion Coaching,” start at 11:35.0
  - o Mister Rogers, “Helping Children Deal with Tragic Events in the News”
  - o Helpful Parenting Tips (brochures from Talaris): “Getting in Tune With Baby,” “Recognizing Emotions,” “It’s A Stressful Life!”, “ Here Comes A Tantrum”
  - o “10 Emotions, How to Recognize and Value Emotions Beginning at Birth” (Cards from Talaris)
  - o Foldout card—“What Am I Feeling? The Five Steps of Emotion Coaching”
  - o Parenting Counts refrigerator door card—(with adhesive strips)
  - o Parenting Counts Bookmark, “Encourage Reading with Your Child”
  - o t-shirts and fabric markers
  - o bop bags and bats
  - o refreshments
  - o rewards i.e. door prizes, clothes, books (prior to session decide how the incentives and prizes will be distributed)
- Set up the meeting room



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## **HELPING YOUR CHILD HANDLE EMOTIONS AFTER HURRICANES, TRAUMA, DISASTER, OR OTHER LOSS**

### **ADULT WORKSHOP**

#### **1) Opening and Ground Rules**

Thank everyone for attending. Introduce yourself and other trainers. Explain that you are from LPB and ECSS. Invite participants to introduce themselves. Note where the restrooms are that invite participants to take a break when needed.

Review the Ground Rules:

- All opinions are honored.
- Everyone has the right to pass (on speaking, participating in activity, etc.)
- Everyone is respected
- One person talks at a time

#### **2) Icebreaker**

Show excerpt from Sesame Street video, "Hurricane on Sesame Street." (3 minutes, 14 seconds)

Point out that some people were telling Big Bird that things were "all right." But Big Bird's home has been damaged, and he tells them that things are not all right. Ask what they think Big Bird was feeling?

Participant Discussion:

What emotions have you been feeling since the hurricanes (loss trauma or disaster)? How do your feelings change during the day? What do you do to relieve them? Your child may also be having emotional reactions to the situation as well as reflecting the emotions you experience.

#### **3) Reactions to Loss**

- a) Adults know that bad things can happen during life—like fires, hurricanes, tornados—and that they can cause loss of things that they are attached to—like homes, cars, furniture, even jobs and can cause the death of loved ones. They know these losses would make them feel sad, depressed, lonely, frustrated. They also may know ways to cope with these feelings. Children may not.

Children must learn how to handle loss and to cope with what they are feeling. Parents and care givers, when they are aware of a child's feelings, can help the child cope.

- b) What are common reactions of children to disaster, loss or trauma?

How a child responds to a loss, disaster or trauma depends in part on the child's ability to understand and interact with the environment and other people, on how dependent the child is upon others for care, and the child's ability to express itself.

Infants (ages 0-2) are totally dependant on others for their care. They sense the caregivers emotions and respond to them. If the adult is calm, the child will feel secure. If the adult is agitated, the child will feel insecure and may be fussy, have difficulty being soothed, have trouble sleeping and eating, or may be withdrawn, lethargic, or unresponsive.

Toddlers (age 2-4) have begun interacting with the world around them, but they still are dependent on adults for their care. They generally have limited understanding of and ability to express what they are feeling. They mirror the adult's feelings. If the adult is calm, the child will feel secure. If the adult is agitated, the toddler will feel insecure and may be more clingy, passive and withdrawn. The toddler may also have trouble eating and sleeping, and revert to earlier behavior—having less control over bowel and bladder, thumb-sucking, “acting like a baby.” They also may be irritable, defiant and have tantrums.

Preschoolers (ages 4-6) interact more with their environment and other people. They are able to express themselves somewhat through play, talk and behavior. They may ask many questions, particularly about what has happened and what will happen to them. But they still may misinterpret and misunderstand what is happening around them. They may feel sad and angry. They may also be fearful and revert to earlier behaviors like bed-wetting, increased tantrums. They may fear being abandoned or injured and resist separating from their caregivers. They may be more irritable, defiant, and aggressive. They also may have difficulty doing activities that they previously enjoyed and have trouble eating and sleeping.

School age (ages 6-11) children are more independent and can better express their thoughts and feelings and are more active with classmates and in learning and physical activities. However, after a disaster they may regress—clinging to parents, withdrawing from classmates and friends, no longer participating in usual activities, and trying to avoid school. They may easily lose interest and focus resulting in poorer school performance. They may have nightmares, disruptions in sleeping and eating, and may be more anxious or aggressive.

*(From “Reaction of Children to a Disaster,” at  
<http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/disasterrelief/publications/allpubs/KEN01-0101/default.asp>,  
December 1, 2005*

*And Parents’ Guide for Helping Children in the Wake of Disaster at  
[http://www.nccev.org/docs/Parents%20Guide%20\(Sept.%202005\).pdf](http://www.nccev.org/docs/Parents%20Guide%20(Sept.%202005).pdf) )*

#### 4) What Is Your Child Feeling?

Show Parenting Counts video, “Book of Jenny”—you have to read baby cues.) 60 seconds

Handouts: “Getting in Tune with Baby,” “Recognizing Emotions,” “It’s a Stressful Life!”

- Before talking, babies communicate with facial expressions, and body language
- You must learn what your baby’s expressions and body language mean.
- With older children you can read cues and talk with them to identify what they are feeling
- Children’s temperaments influence how they respond. All children, even those within the same family do not experience trauma in the same way.

Participant Discussion:

- Show card from “Getting in Tune with My Baby” or with toddlers/preschoolers use the Talaris 10 Emotions cards.
- Ask: What is this child is feeling?

It is okay if they guess wrong about the expressions. We all have the same feelings, but we can guess wrong about what another person is trying to express. We learn to interpret another person’s expressions and sometimes have to use words to confirm what others feel.



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## 5) How Children Learn to Handle Emotions

Show Parenting Counts video, “Rough Day.” 60 seconds

- The child learns how to handle stress and other emotions from watching how you handle your emotions.
- You can help them learn how to calm themselves and handle their own feelings.
- Letting a child “cry it out” will not make it a “tougher” adult.
- Emotional moments are opportunities to help teach your child how to handle difficult emotions.
- Teaching your child how to calm itself and cope with emotions will help it later in life.
- You cannot “spoil” your baby with love and attention
- Feelings are not bad, though a child may act inappropriately in expressing feelings (such as hurting someone else or property.)
- Styles of Parenting—
  - o dismissive of what the child feels—Parent tries to distract the child from its feelings rather than deal with them. The child is confused by feeling one way and being told to feel another
  - o disapproving of what the child feels—Parent tells the child not to feel negative emotions, like anger and sadness. The child learns not to trust feelings.
  - o anything goes— Parent conveys that it is okay to feel all emotions, but does not teach the child how to handle them. The child needs limits.
  - o emotion coaching—Parent helps the child identify feelings and deal with them appropriately.

## 6) Emotional Coaching: What You Can Do.

Show video: excerpt from “Emotion Coaching: Parenting Styles & Five Steps of Emotion Coaching.” (Starts at 11:35.0.) Duration is about 7 minutes.

Handout: Foldout card—“What Am I Feeling? The Five Steps of Emotion Coaching”

Step 1: Emotional Awareness—Recognize Your Own Emotions First.

- Get in touch with your own emotions, from happiness to sadness to anger.
- Try to be calm around your child.
- Understand that emotions are a natural and valuable part of life.
- Observe, listen and learn how children express different emotions.
- Watch for changes in facial expressions, body language, posture, and tone of voice.

Step 2: Connecting—Connect with the child during emotional moments.

- Pay close attention to the child’s emotions. Don’t dismiss or avoid them.
- See emotional moments as opportunities for drawing close and teaching.
- Share in its feelings and encourage the child to talk about its emotions.
- Provide guidance before emotions escalate into a crisis.

Step 3: Listening—Listen with Empathy and Honor the Emotions of the Child.

- Take the child’s emotions seriously.
- Show the child that you understand what he or she is feeling.
- Avoid judging or criticizing the child’s emotions.

Step 4: Naming Emotions—Help the child identify and name its emotions.

- Identify the emotions the child is experiencing.
- Naming the emotion helps soothe the child.
- Set an example by naming your emotions and talking about them.
- Help the child build a vocabulary for their feelings so they can identify and talk about them.

Step 5: Finding Good Solutions—Support the child and explore appropriate ways to deal with emotions.

- No feeling is bad. A child may use inappropriate behavior to express feelings, but the feeling should not be disciplined.
- Encourage emotional expression but set clear limits on behavior.
- Help the child think through possible solutions or ways to handle feelings.

Children express their emotions externally or “on the outside” before they experience them on the inside like adults. When they are worried or mad, they express this in their behavior. The best way children learn self-control is to understand about emotions and what the child CAN DO to express these strong feelings (just punishing bad behavior does not teach self-control). Parents should help children learn to recognize the emotions behind their child’s bad behavior and help their child recognize this too.

- Sometimes children misbehave to ask for more limits and consistency in their environment. Routines and limits are the most important ways to help children feel safe and to learn to behave well. Parents must also remember to talk to their children about routines and limits, make sure they understand the rules as well as “the why behind the rule.”

## 7) What Causes Stress and Things That May Help a Child Cope

Handout: Mister Rogers “Helping Children Deal with Tragic Events in the News”

What things can cause stress?

Examples of things that can cause stress:

- when the child is hurt or uncomfortable
  - o is hungry
  - o needs a diaper change
  - o when it misses something or someone
- when it gets too much stimulation
- when it is left alone too much
- when people around it are stressed or upset
- when limits are not set and when routines are disrupted
- strong emotions (such as fear)



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What things to help children cope?

For infants:

- Get to know the cues your baby uses to express different emotions
- Try different ways to comfort it. You must learn what helps.
  - o Hold, cuddle massage, or softly pat the baby
  - o comfort the baby when it cries
  - o spend time talking, rocking, singing, reading, or playing with the baby
  - o give baby frequent attention
  - o try to follow your baby's lead—if participating, continue. If fussy, pause and let the child relax for a moment while you are near

(Show Parenting Counts video, "Morning Madness") 60 seconds

For toddlers and preschoolers:

- Recognize and validate emotions
- children worry who will take care of them—they need to hear their parents are doing all they can to take care of them and keep them safe.
- Continue with ordinary routines of life, as much as possible.
  - o Immediately after the loss, relax expectations at home or at school, with the understanding that this is temporary.
  - o Allow temporary changes in sleep arrangements—such as allowing the child to sleep with the light on or with the door open, remaining with the child while the child falls asleep, letting the child sleep in another child's room. As children feel more secure these arrangements can be adjusted back to normal.
  - o Give child some control over environment such as choosing food, clothes, games to play, as long as they are appropriate.
- Hold and comfort the child. Give frequent hugs.
- Reassure the child that you will take care of them.
- Limit exposure to loud television and loud noises and excessive activity.
- Limit exposure to discussion of or television coverage of traumatic events.
- Encourage the child to express feelings appropriately. (Be sure the child understands: It is okay to be angry, but it is not okay to hurt ourselves or others.) Some children may want to talk about the trauma, others may not. Others may vent feelings during play or through art activities.
- Listen to child during playtime for clues what it is feeling
  - o help child identify emotion and build a vocabulary to express what they feel
  - o notice and acknowledge what your child is feeling
  - o talk with child before it escalates
  - o help them think of solutions to the situation
- Schedule play sessions with other children.
- Plan calming, comforting pre-bedtime activities.

For school age children:

- Be patient and tolerant as they cope with their feelings
- Continue with ordinary routines of life, as much as possible.
  - Immediately after the loss, relax expectations at home or at school, with the understanding that this is temporary.
- Become aware of their concerns by listening to them and watching how they act and play.
- Provide accurate information to their questions
- Correct misconceptions
- Limit exposure to television news
- Arrange play with adults and their friends
- Encourage physical activities and expression of their feelings through art, music, and writing.

### 8) Dealing with Tantrums (usually end by 4 or 5 years of age)

Handout: "Here Comes a Tantrum"

- Stay close and stay calm.
- Maybe sit near the child on the floor.
- Speak softly to the child
- After the child calms down, ask the child what it was feeling.
- Talk about what happened.
- If someone was injured or something was damaged during the tantrum, tell the child that is not okay.
- Don't punish the child for having a tantrum.

### 9) Q&A and Follow-up

Allow time for the psychologist in the children's session to talk to each parent about their child's reaction to the children's session.

Give final handouts:

Children's Books

Parenting Counts Bookmarks: "Encourage Reading with Your Child"

Parenting Counts refrigerator door card with adhesive strips

Door prizes

### LINKS FOR MATERIALS USED IN WORKSHOPS:

Mister Rogers Materials

<http://pbskids.org/rogers/parentsteachers/special/scarynews-thoughts.html>

<http://pbskids.org/rogers/parentsteachers/special/scarynews.html>

To order:

Sesame Street Friends to the Rescue

<http://www.sonymusicstore.com/store/catalog/TalentDetails.jsp?talentId=400881>

To order:

Parenting Counts Materials

<http://www.talaris.org/store.htm>