

Parents and teachers are those people who will be closer to children either during or immediately after a natural disaster. More important, they know very well pre-disaster children's behavior and character, thus being able to recognize and understand the emotional signs of a psychological burden and respond immediately on a proper way.

THE PARENTS' RESPONSE

The parents, even if they are afraid themselves, which is reasonable, they mustn't lose the control of the situation. Thereafter, when the danger is gone, they should focus on their children emotional needs. More specifically, after a disaster the parents may:

Organising daily life:

- Keep the family members together to the greatest extend.
- Encourage children to participate in all efforts needed in order for the family to stand on its feet, and particularly in repairing the damages.
- Begin new fun activities for the family.
- Reassess the family's preparedness for emergencies.
- After some time, make a collective reevaluation of what has happened.

Offering psychological support:

- Present a realistic, yet manageable, view of the destruction.
- Explain the situation to children in a calm and constant way.
- Encourage children to express their fears and describe how they feel. • Apart from their children, parents should also share their fears and
- experiences in family discussions. • Reassure children with sensitivity and love, until they realize that life will again
- come to normal. Maintain physical contact with their children, ie hug and touch them often.
- Be supportive and not critical to children.
- Give and receive support from family members, friends and society.
 - Try laughing and using humor.
 - Confirm and complement each other within the family.

Acting practically:

- Discuss with children what to do if an earthquake happens again.
- Maintain their principles considering their children upbringing, but be more flexible in less important matters.
- Stay close to children when they go to sleep.
- Keep children away from television. • Encourage children to do their homework and play with their friends.

Dealing with symptoms:

- Be empathetic to possible regressive behaviors such as bedwetting and soiling, and behaviors displayed at younger ages.
- Observe children for headaches, abdominal pains and other complaints, as anxiety is often expressed with physical symptoms.
- Try to distinguish and understand the factors that cause anxiety and fears to children.
- Allow their children to "mourn" for loved things that they might have lost because of the earthquake.
- If children face problems at school, the parents should ask for the cooperation of their teachers.
- Be aware that while most emotional reactions of children do not last long after the disaster, there might be some reactions which show up for the first time (or
- even reappear) after several months. • Let time heal the psychological traumas.
- Be more tolerant with children and other family members.
- When children do not respond to their parents' interventions and still have problematic behavior, seek help from mental health experts.



THE ROLE OF TEACHERS

Teachers can help children get back faster to normal activities, carrying fewer traumas, and consider the earthquake as a life experience. Below are some suggestions that might be useful for educators to follow:

During the earthquake

- Maintain their composure. • Remind the appropriate behavior in case of an earthquake, which they
- themselves have taught children at a previous time.
- Give sharp commands in a decisive manner, but not shout or speak rough as that may cause greater panic.
- Reassure children who are upset and are likely to scream or cry.
- Be aware that if they react in panic to an earthquake, this will affect their students.

Immediately after the earthquake

- Lead children to a safe place and stay with them. Embrace young children who are crying.
- Be empathetic to the children's fear.
- Reassure children's concerns.
- Assure children that the danger is gone.
- Look after the children until they are picked up by their parents.



Following period after the earthquake

- Return to school schedule as soon as possible.
- Give honest answers to the questions that children may pose regarding the facts. • Express their own fears and as it is natural to have such feelings.
- Create a supportive environment where children feel comfortable to share their feelings.
- Ask children to write down or draw anything they want about earthquakes.
- Show understanding to children who behave as if they are of younger age and complain of pains not due to physical reasons.
- Be reassuring and optimistic about the outcome of the situation without giving non-realistic promises, like such an event won't happen again.
- Answer patiently to repeatedly-posed questions, because children often ask again and again the same thing in order to confirm the information. • Observe 'post-traumatic symptoms', i.e. if after some weeks a child keeps
- showing withdrawal, concentration difficulties, easy crying, reduction of their
- interest, irritability. • Communicate and cooperate with parents.

