

**GCCHM Leadership Certification
Level VI, Course #5**

**TALKING TO KIDS ABOUT DISASTER
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(Presenter's Notes)**

Today many children have to deal with disasters and catastrophes that make them fearful and anxious. How can we minister to these children and families who have been affected by a disaster? Here are some tips from Dale Hudson, Insight E-Magazine, for children's leaders.

1. Observe How The Child Is Reacting

PRESCHOOLERS

- thumb sucking, bed-wetting, clinging to parents, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, fear of the dark, regression in behavior and withdrawal from friends and routines. (National Association of School Psychologists)

What Can You Do?

- Reassure them that you are by their side; that it's okay to feel sad and scared.
- Create an open and supportive environment where they can ask questions.
- It's best not to force children to talk about things or their fears unless and until they're ready.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL CHILDREN

- Irritability, aggressiveness, clinginess, nightmares, school avoidance, poor concentration and withdrawal from activities and friends.

What Can You Do?

- Children can cope more effectively with a disaster when they feel they understand what is happening and what they can do to help protect themselves, family, and friends.
- Provide basic information to help them understand, without providing unnecessary details that may only alarm them.
- Limit media coverage of the disaster—they don't benefit from graphic details or exposure to disturbing images or sounds. Instead sit down together and talk as a family.
- Sleeping and eating disturbances, agitation, increase in conflicts, physical complaints, delinquent behavior and poor concentration.

What Can You Do?

- Older children will likely want, and benefit from, additional information about the disaster and recovery efforts.

- Start by asking children what they already know and what questions they have. Use that as a guide for conversation.
- Be reassuring, but don't make unrealistic promises. It's fine to let children know that they are safe in their house or in their school. But you can't promise that there won't be another earthquake or other natural disaster.

2. Respond to the Child's Reaction

- Acknowledge and accept their reaction.
- Empathize with their reaction.
- If they cry, it is okay to cry with them.

3. Listen. Ask questions. Listen. Ask questions

- Allow children to express their feelings, concerns and fears.
- Listening will help them to prove it.
- Encourage them to write down or draw what they are feeling.

4. Be Prepared To Answer Their Questions Several Times.

- Be prepared to repeat information and explanations several times. Some information may be hard to accept or understand. Asking the same question over and over may also be a way for a child to ask for reassurance.

5. Share God's promises with the child

- Read appropriate Bible verses that deal with what the child is feeling.
- Have them read to you and share what it means to them.

Bible Promises

- **The Bible promises our loved ones who have died will live again.** It's in the Bible, "Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear His voice and come out--those who have done good will rise to live, and those who have done evil will rise to be condemned" (John 5:28-29, NIV).
- **He has promised an end to death, sorrow, and pain.** "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away" (Revelation 21:4, NIV).

6. Pray with the child about the tragedy

Prayer Time

- Set aside time to pray with children during times of disasters and crises.
- Give children the opportunity to make prayer requests and express their concerns, but don't compel them.
- Children can offer to pray or parents can do the prayer.
- Close your prayer that acknowledges the situation and conveys a sense of hope for the future.

7. Let the child know that Jesus is their best friend and will always be with them no matter what they go through.

Jesus Is Our Friend

- We live in a world of troubles, storms, and stress.
- We can still trust Jesus in times of stress.
- Jesus invites us to cast our worries on Him because He cares. (1 Peter 5:7)
- Jesus will be our Comforter in sorrow when our heart is faint. (Jeremiah 8:18)
- He offers strength when we are weak. (Philippines 4:13)

8. Help meet their needs

- If the child and family need food or clothing, get members and others to help provide that.

Involve Your Children

- Organize outreach activities to involve children to help the victims affected by disasters.
- Children can help fill boxes with toiletries, food, blankets, and other needed items.
- Take the children out to distribute food boxes for disaster victims & families.

8. Help the children get back into a routine as soon as possible

- Routine brings security and stability back into a child's life.

9. Be there

- Even if you are at a loss for words, just being there for the child and his family will make a difference.