



First Nations Health Authority
Health through wellness

Recognizing and Resolving Trauma in Children During Disasters

Disasters affect individuals in many ways. The emotional effects may show up immediately or appear weeks to months later. Here are some helpful tips for recognizing and responding to trauma in children brought on by disaster situations:



Short to mid-term behaviors you may see in your children who are experiencing trauma could include:

- A return to earlier behavior, (thumb sucking or bed wetting)
- Clinging to parents, crying and screaming
- Reluctance to go to bed
- Nightmares
- Fantasies that the disaster never happened
- Refusal to attend school
- Problems at school
- Inability to concentrate
- Withdrawal, immobility

It is important to understand that there is a natural grieving process following any loss. A disaster of any size can cause unusual or unwanted stress. If you are seeing any of these behaviors there are things you can do to support each other.

Below are five tips to nurture children's resiliency in an emergency or following a loss or disaster.

- ✓ **Talk** to your children about their feelings and your feelings. You will find that many feelings are shared, regardless of age.
- ✓ **Encourage** your children to draw pictures of the disaster. This will help you understand how they view what happened.
- ✓ **Talk** with your children about what happened, providing factual information that they can understand. Talk about your family's preparedness, including the role your children can take.
- ✓ **Reassure** your children that you and they are safe. Repeat this assurance as often as necessary.
- ✓ **Hold** your children. Touch provides extra reassurance that someone is there for them. Spend extra time with them, especially at bedtime. Sing songs or say prayers with them and maintain the spirit of regular family or cultural practices.