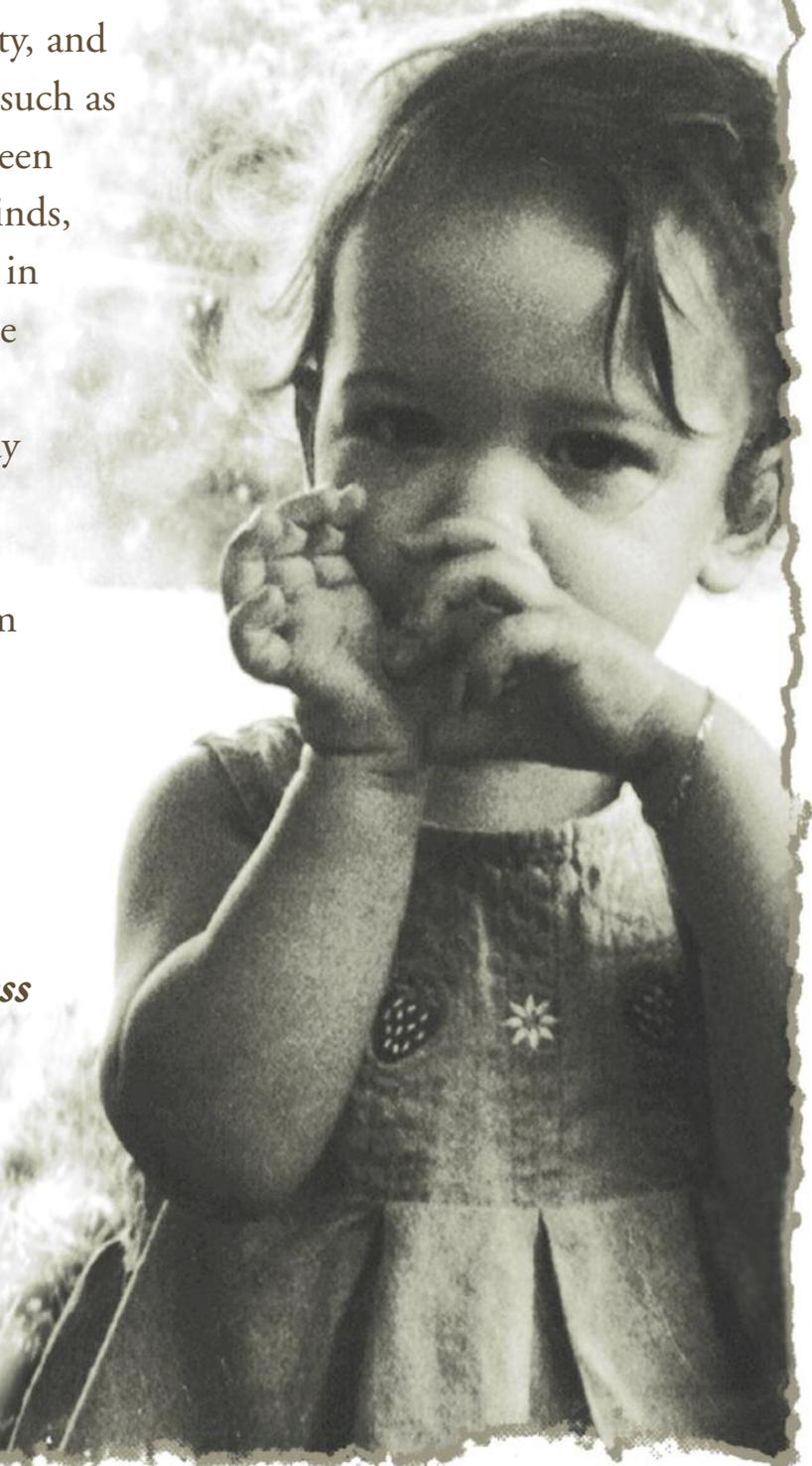


Reassuring Your Child After the Storm

Children may feel stress, anxiety, and fear after experiencing trauma such as a hurricane. They may have been scared by loud noises, fierce winds, and damaged houses and trees in their neighborhood. They sense the stress, loss and anxiety of others around them. They may be upset by the change in routine. They may be sad because they are separated from their family or friends.

Even little children, who can't yet talk, can feel stress and loss. Although they can't tell us what is bothering them, their feelings show in their faces and expressions.





Ways to Reassure Your Child

1 View the situation from your child's perspective. How does this feel from *your child's* point of view? Is she frightened? Does she know what's going to happen next? Is she afraid of all the new people and strange places? Does she miss his toys or friends? Is she scared by the "port-a-potty" or the loud noises? Be understanding if your child won't leave your side.

2 Comfort your child. See when your child is having a hard time and needs comforting. Respond promptly and talk calmly. Hold him close. Remind your child that you love him and will keep him safe. When he has trouble sleeping, rub his back, give him a toy to cuddle, lay with him awhile, or let him sleep with you for the night. Reassure him that you will be nearby and that everything will be all right.

3 Children thrive on routines.



Most children get stressed and fussy when routines are changed. Changes in sleeping or mealtime can upset a child for the rest of the day. When you can, reestablish some normal routines. A familiar routine gives children a sense of order and security.

4 Tell children what to expect about daily activities.



Talk about plans. This helps children adjust to new situations. *"First, we're going to have breakfast, and then we're going to the insurance office, to Home Depot, and then we'll be back at the shelter for dinner and bedtime. Tomorrow we're going to a new house."* Familiar things from home may help your child feel more comfortable — his favorite stuffed animal, toy, or blankie. Knowing what to expect reduces anxiety and makes life seem easier for everyone.

5 Acknowledge fear and its causes. Help put words to your child's feelings. *"Yes, the storm was really scary — but now everything is OK."* Encourage your child to talk about fears. Don't ignore or laugh at his fears. *"That loud noise scared you. That's okay."* Give lots of encouragement and talk about what's going on.

6 Slow down. When you feel hurried or scared, so do your children. Everyone gets fussy. Be realistic about what you can accomplish today. Find a moment to enjoy doing something with your child.



7 Accept temporary changes in behavior. Children may lose previous skills. For example, they may revert to baby talk or wet the bed. If this happens, don't make a big deal out of it. It may be a call for extra comfort in a stressful time.

8 Reassure. You are your child's security. Children are more confident when they know you are nearby. Tell your child where you're going, even if you're out of sight for just a few minutes. *"I'm going to the bathroom or outside and will be back in 5 minutes."* Sneaking out when he's not looking may make him worry more. Instead, give him a hug and kiss, and tell him when you'll be back.



9 Keep 'em busy. Try to find ways to entertain your children. Telling stories, singing songs, or playing "pretend" may help time pass and be a way to share happy feelings.

Dealing with Storm Fears

1. Parents: Handling Your Own Concerns

Find a trusted adult that you can talk with about the experience.

Adult concerns are best shared with other adults. When you have a safe place for your feelings then you can provide a safe place for your child's feelings.

2. Ways to Talk with Your Child

★ When your child looks frightened or can only describe the worst moments...

You can say: "Yes it's been scary, but ...

...think about all the people who've helped us

...remember the funny _____ (food/place/person)

...remember how silly it looked when _____"

What this conveys to your child:

You acknowledge their fear but also help them remember and talk about other emotions.

★ When your child is impatient...

You can say: "Yes the day seems long but when we get things done together, it is such a help to mommy."

What this conveys to your child:

It is important for everyone to help each other.

★ When your child keeps asking when things will happen...

You can say: "I'm not sure when it will happen, but Mommy or Daddy is working on it."

What this conveys to your child:

Adults are here for me and will keep me safe.

3. Remembering the Experience

Even very little children will remember the experience – what it sounded like, who was there. How you tell and retell the story of the hurricane will be a part of your family's history. *Be sure to include:*

- how people helped you
- how you found new safe places
- how your family helped each other feel better

The stressful event becomes a story of coping. It will help your child make sense of all that happened.