

Children's Reactions To Disaster By Different Age Groups



Ages	Regression	Body	Emotions
1 – 5 years	Resumption of bedwetting, thumbsucking, fear of darkness.	Loss of appetite, indigestion, vomiting, bowel or bladder problems, sleep disorders.	Nervousness, irritability, disobedience, intractability, tics, speech difficulties, refusal to leave proximity of parents.
5 – 11 years	Increased competition with younger siblings for parents' attention.	Headaches, complaints of visual or hearing problems, persistent itching and scratching, sleep disorders.	School phobia, withdrawal from play groups, friends, and family contacts, unusual behavior, loss of interest in previously preferred activities, inability to concentrate and drop in level of school achievement.
11 – 14 years	Competing with younger siblings for parental attention, failure to carry out chores, school phobia, reappearance of earlier speech and behavior habits.	Headaches, complaints of vague aches and pains, loss of appetite, bowel problems, acute appearance of skin disorders, sleep disturbance.	Loss of interest in peer social activities, loss of interest in hobbies and recreation, increased difficulty in relating with sibs and parents, sharp increase in resisting parental or school authority.
14 – 18 years	Resumption of earlier behaviors and attitudes, decline in previous responsible behavior, decline in emancipation struggles over parental control, decline in sexual interests and activities	Bowel and bladder complaints, headaches, skin rash, sleep disorders, disorders of digestion.	Marked increase or decline in physical activity level, frequent expression of feelings of inadequacy and helplessness, increased difficulties in concentration on planned activities.

By David Wee, M.S.S.W., 1994. Adapted from Farberow, N.L. and Frederick, C. J. Training Manual for Human Service Workers in Major Disasters. Rockville, Maryland: National Institute for Mental Health. 1978.

SURE: Intervention Options for Children's Reactions to Disaster



Ages	Support	Understanding	Reassurance	Encouragement
1 – 5 years	Give warm milk and comforting bedtime routines.	Permit child to sleep in parents' room or with sibling.	Give additional verbal assurance and ample physical comfort.	Provide opportunity and encouragement for expression of emotion through activities.
5 – 11 years	Give additional attention and consideration. Provide gentle but firm insistence on relatively more responsibility than one would expect from a younger child.	Temporarily lessen requirements for optimum performance in home and school activities.	Provide opportunity for structured, but not demanding, chores and responsibilities at home. Rehearse safety measures to be taken in future disasters.	Encourage verbal expression of thoughts and feelings about the disaster.
11 – 14 years	Give additional attention and consideration.	Temporarily lower expectations of performance in school and home activities.	Provide structured but undemanding responsibilities and rehabilitation activities. Rehearse safety measures for future disasters.	Encourage verbal expression of feelings and assist child to become involved with same-age children.
14 – 18 years	Be available if adolescent wants to talk. Share own feelings as a role model.	If adolescent chooses to discuss disaster fears within family setting, such expression should be encouraged but not insisted upon.	Reduce expectations for level of school and general performance temporarily. Rehearse safety measures to be taken for future disasters.	Encourage discussion of disaster experiences with peers and extra-family significant others, and assist in becoming involved with peer social activities.

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