



## Put It Into Practice #1

### Five Ways To Support Children and Youth In Child Welfare Who Experience a Natural Disaster

► **When should I use this resource?** DURING and IMMEDIATELY AFTER a natural disaster occurs

#### 1. Encourage adult caregivers and family members to model calm behavior

Children tend to mirror the reactions of adults around them and will learn ideas for how to take care of themselves from what adults in their environment do. Children and youth in child welfare who have already experienced trauma before a natural disaster are more likely to be triggered by an additional traumatic event. Modeling calm behavior and being aware of trauma reminders can help children and youth stay calm and feel supported. Parents and caregivers may benefit from finding opportunities to take a moment for themselves, express their feelings, acknowledge that the natural disaster is a scary situation, and engage in a coping strategy to calm themselves.

#### 2. Provide simple and accurate information about the natural disaster in a calm voice

Proactively discuss with children and youth in a developmentally appropriate way what has happened and what will happen next. Many children involved in child welfare have experienced family separation or removal from their home, and they may be especially sensitive to additional separations from supports and loved ones. Talking openly about what to expect and avoiding further placement disruption is important for reducing anxiety and trauma reminders.

#### 3. Maintain regular contact between children/youth and social supports

Allowing children and youth to have regular contact with safe and supportive adults, family, and peers during and immediately after a natural disaster is important for promoting their emotional wellbeing. Consider revising policies on electronic access and ensure regular check-ins with children and youth – ideally, in person or at minimum, via phone or video call.

#### 4. Attend to physical safety

Assess for physical safety in the child or youth's home and school environment, particularly in cases of potential structural damage. Work with children, youth, and families to enhance safety in the physical environment or identify other safe environments, as needed.

#### 5. Attend to emotional safety by encouraging comforting and distracting activities

Children and youth may benefit from doing slow breathing to calm their bodies, having a stuffed animal or blanket to hold, or having musical or artistic outlets. See handouts from the NCTSN for activities children and youth can do inside at <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/simple-activities-children-and-adolescents>



## Put It Into Practice #2

### Dos And Dont's For Talking With Children and Youth About a Natural Disaster

► **When should I use this resource?** AFTER a natural disaster occurs, once the child or youth is ready to receive support

**Directions:** Before talking to children, youth, their caregivers or family members about a natural disaster, review the 10 DOs and DON'Ts below, then review **Put it Into Practice #3** for examples of specific questions to ask.

DO	DON'T
DO listen and help the child, youth, or family member sort out their thoughts and feelings in a way that they feel is most helpful.	DON'T offer generic reassurance (“everything will be okay”), false hope or encouragement, or promises that you cannot fulfill.
DO carefully assess for current major stressors, dangers, or other safety risks.	DON'T make assumptions about what is stressful or feels like a threat to the child, youth, or family member; ask them directly.
DO learn about the specific ways the natural disaster has affected their personal life and their personal relationships.	DON'T overlook the importance of personal relationships, key supports, and important activities that a natural disaster may make more difficult.
DO acknowledge distress as understandable in the circumstances with empathy and without judgement.	DON'T provide overly simplistic reassurance or advice, and do not attempt to convince them to feel or think differently.
DO build on their strengths, interests, and talents to brainstorm new or different ways of coping.	DON'T use coping skills that focus on deficits or are not tailored to their development/age, personality, culture, and preferences.
DO identify and reinforce positive ways they interact with their support systems (including prosocial peers).	DON'T assume that their relationships are supportive or overlook areas of conflict or tension in their relationships.
DO identify and reinforce ways they get support through participation in activities (including faith-based) that are meaningful and enjoyable to each child and youth.	DON'T limit their ability to draw on sources of positive support from people and activities.
DO make sure they leave every conversation you have with them with at least one action step or tool that provides a sense of progress toward supporting their well-being.	DON'T treat any conversation with a youth or family member as pointless or worthless — that's a big missed opportunity.
DO establish practical ways for them to maintain ongoing contact with you.	DON'T ignore them because you are too busy or focused on someone else — check in with them whenever you can.

Source: Adapted from Ford, J. (2020). *Working together in the pandemic: Tips for front-line juvenile justice staff*. Los Angeles, CA, and Durham, NC: National Center for Child Traumatic Stress.



## Put It Into Practice #3

### Questions For Older Children And Youth About Their Strengths And Needs

► **When should I use this resource?** DURING and AFTER a natural disaster occurs

**Directions:** Use the sample questions below to ensure that school-age children, adolescents, and transition-age youth have a voice in identifying their own strengths and needs in four key areas during and after a natural disaster: information and resources, social connections, physical safety and wellness, and emotional safety and wellness. This is not an exhaustive list, and you may want to add your own questions.

#### Information & Resources

Example questions for older children and youth

- Is there anything you want to know about [natural disaster/pandemic]?
- Is there anything you want to know about how the services you receive from [child welfare agency] may be different during [natural disaster/pandemic]?
- What types of support would help you during [disaster/pandemic]? (*Prompts: food, clothing, housing, financial assistance, education, employment, mental health or substance abuse treatment*)
- What other information or supports might you need during [disaster/pandemic]?

#### Social Connections

Example questions for older children and youth

- How are things going at home? (*Prompts: biological, foster, and/or kinship home*)
- How are your family members doing? (*Prompts: biological, foster, and/or kin*)
- Are you getting the support you need from your family and friends? If not, what do you need?
- Are there family members or friends that you need help getting in touch with?

#### Physical Safety & Wellness

Example questions for older children and youth

- How are you feeling physically? Are you having health concerns? If so, what?
- How well are you taking care of yourself? (*Prompts: exercise, sleep, nutrition, self-care, hobbies, medical care, mental health care*)
- Are your basic needs being met? (*Prompts: sleep, having enough food, safe housing, enough money, access to education/employment, medical care, and mental health care*)
- Is there anything that is making you feel physically unsafe right now? If yes, what's making you feel unsafe? What would you need in order to feel safe?

#### Emotional Safety & Wellness

Example questions for older children and youth

- How are you feeling about the [natural disaster/pandemic]?
- It's common to feel stressed, worried, irritable, or depressed when there's a natural disaster or pandemic. Are you having any of those feelings? If so, tell me about what you're feeling.
- Some people use more alcohol/drugs during a natural disaster or pandemic. Is this a concern for you?
- Are you getting the emotional support you need?
- What type of emotional support would be helpful to you?
- What's going well for you? Are there ways [child welfare agency] can help you continue to do well?