



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>