



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.