

Children are especially vulnerable to disasters, as their sense of security and safety is shaken. Be aware that children may experience all the above-mentioned signs, and particularly nightmares, regression to behavior characteristic of younger ages (bedwetting, crying out, wanting to sleep with parents), physical complaints (stomach aches, headaches), fear of leaving home (school phobia), over-attachment to parents, withdrawal from others and acting out (aggression, delinquency). Some reactions are age-specific; for example, younger children may not understand what is going on, and teens may exhibit more risk-taking behaviors. Age will also determine how well children can express their feelings and needs; younger children can be asked to draw their feelings about the event as well as a happier resolution to the emergency. To help children, be aware of your own responses (stay as calm as possible), offer reassurance, make them feel safe, spend more “quality” time, maintain their routine, acknowledge their ability to cope. Work with school teachers, officials and guidance counselors. Seek professional help and aid from organizations geared to helping children cope with trauma.