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## A Parent's Guide to Disaster Risk Reduction

# STAY SAFE AND BE PREPARED

This Guide is part of a three-book Compendium on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR).

The other guides are:

*Stay safe and be prepared: a teacher's guide to disaster risk reduction (ISBN 978-92-3-100044-7)*

*Stay safe and be prepared: a student's guide to disaster risk reduction (ISBN 978-92-3-100031-7)*

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**A Parent's Guide  
to Disaster Risk Reduction**

**STAY SAFE  
AND BE PREPARED**

*Dear fellow parent,*

*Thank you for taking the time to go through this Guide.*

*As parents, we all want our child to grow up healthy and happy. One way we can accomplish this is to make sure that he or she is safe from disasters. This means that we help children be safe, whether they are at home, at school and at play, and that we help them learn about disasters. For this, we, parents, need to know how to prevent disasters as well as how to be prepared for them.*

*With this Guide, we hope to assist you in keeping your family safe from disasters. It is part of a three-book compendium — including one designed for children, and one for teachers. The Student's Guide is written in comic-book format and contains a number of disaster risk reduction (DRR) activities that are connected to those in this Parents' Guide.*

*There are three parts to the Parents' Guide. In the first part, you'll find an overview of recent disaster trends, as well as some basic disaster-related information. The second part provides ideas on how you can help make your house, your child's school and your community safer from and better prepared for disasters. Finally, the last part discusses how to deal with disasters, including how to deal with the strong emotions that disasters bring up.*

*Stay safe.*

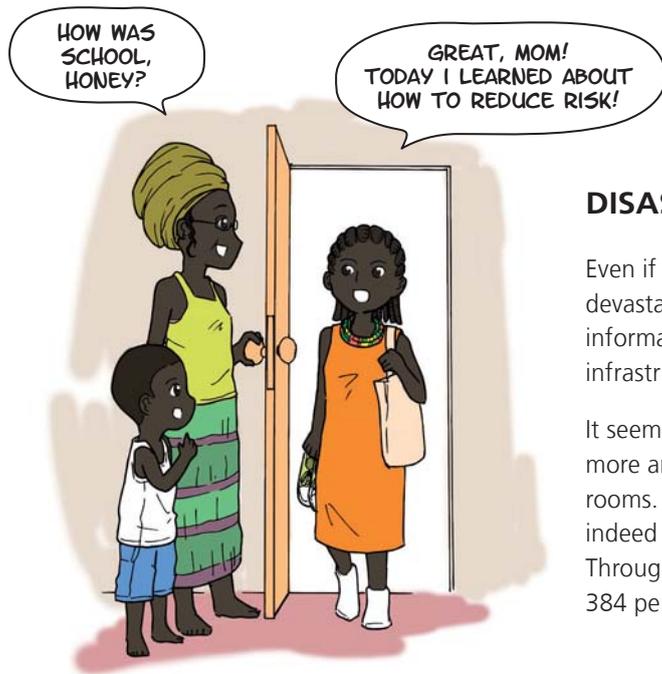
*Sincerely,  
A parent*

*Encourage your child to share what he or she learned at school and to take an active role in family and community DRR activities!*

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# Are We Safe from Disasters?

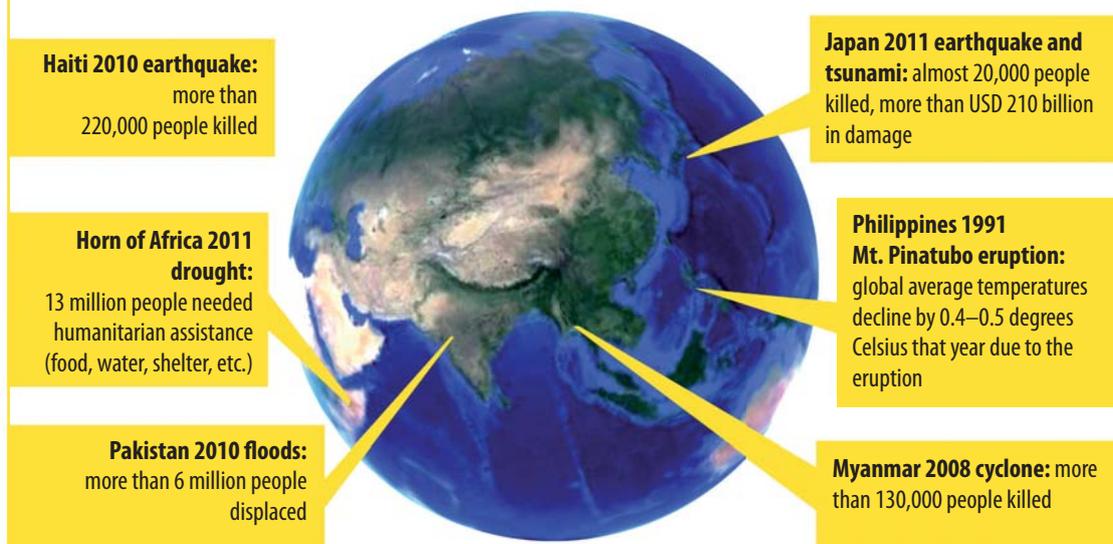


## DISASTER RISK IS RISING

Even if you have never experienced a disaster, you know how devastating its effects can be. The media disseminates lots of information on the impact of disasters: people dead or displaced, infrastructure damaged, livelihoods disrupted, and grief.

It seems that television, radio, newspapers, and the Internet deliver more and more disaster coverage into the comfort of our living rooms. This is maybe not surprising, given that disasters have indeed occurred more frequently in the last couple of decades. Throughout the 2000s, the average frequency of disasters was 384 per year. This number has almost doubled since the 1980s.<sup>1</sup>

## GLOBALLY, THE NUMBER OF DISASTERS HAS BEEN RISING!



1. EM-DAT: The OFDA/CRED International Disaster Database. Université catholique de Louvain. [www.emdat.be](http://www.emdat.be)

With more than 7 billion people living on our planet (compared to just 4.5 billion 30 years ago),<sup>2</sup> more people are living in areas that are exposed to natural hazards and at risk of disaster, such as coastal areas, river deltas, flood plains, slopes, seismic risk zones, drylands, etc. In many places, the natural environment might have protected us from the worst effects of disasters, but our economic activities — such as cutting down rainforests, degrading mangroves, eroding topsoil, and polluting rivers — have led to environmental degradation.

Our children and grandchildren are the ones who suffer the most from disasters. Statistics show that more than half of those affected by disasters worldwide are children. Millions of children can't go to school because of disasters, and this is especially true for those who are displaced.

Think of the 2008 earthquake in Sichuan, People's Republic of China, which caused severe structural damage to more than 6,500 school buildings and took the lives of 10,000 children. Think, too, of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, which caused the death of more than 4,000 children and 7,000 teachers in school buildings.<sup>3</sup> Compare this with Kamaishi Higashi Junior High School in Japan, where over 3,000 students, teachers, and people in the school's neighbourhood were able to safely evacuate during the 2011 tsunami in Japan, because they were prepared.

*As children spend a lot of time at home and in school, it's in our interest as parents that these two places are safe.*



Ruins of a middle school in Ying Xiu Township after the 2008 earthquake in Sichuan, People's Republic of China. © UN Photo/Evan Schneider.



School collapsed by 2010 earthquake in Cité Soleil, Haiti. © UN Photo/Logan Abassi.

2. UNFPA. *The World at 7 Billion*. <http://www.unfpa.org/public/home/sitemap/7Billion>

3. UNESCO and UNICEF, 2014. *Towards a Learning Culture on Safety and Resilience: Technical Guidance for Integrating DRR into the School Curriculum*. Geneva, UNICEF.

I LEARNED AT SCHOOL TODAY  
THAT THERE REALLY ARE NO  
NATURAL DISASTERS!



## WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT DISASTER RISK?

With disasters happening more frequently, it is even more important that we take steps to reduce disaster risk. For this, we first need to understand the components of a disaster.

When we talk about disasters, we often focus on hazards alone. We tend to only look at the earthquake, the volcano eruption, the storm, the drought, the flood, the landslide or the tsunami. We forget that a hazard by itself doesn't cause a disaster. When a cyclone hits an area where nobody lives, it's not a disaster. In other words, what matters is **human's exposure to hazards**.

Now, imagine two neighbouring villages being hit by a storm. One hundred people die in the first village and only five die in the second one. How do we explain this? Most likely, houses in the first village weren't built as well as those in the second one, maybe because people in the first

village couldn't afford to. Or, perhaps more people in the first village couldn't evacuate fast enough — maybe they had health issues or disabilities, were very young or very old or didn't receive the disaster warning early enough. It could also be that people in the second village had developed a good early warning system, had prepared and clearly marked evacuation routes, had performed evacuation drills or had simply secured their houses in anticipation of a storm — i.e., covering their windows, securing their roof and trimming their trees. In other words, people in the first village were more **vulnerable** to being exposed to a storm hazard, while people in the second village had more **capacity** to withstand exposure to a storm hazard.

We need to keep in mind that our very own actions as individuals, families, communities and societies determine if, and how, hazards will turn into disasters. It's therefore inaccurate to talk about 'natural disasters' as each disaster has a human component. It depends on how vulnerable and how prepared we and our communities are.

Acknowledging that humans play an important role in causing disasters is a crucial step. It motivates us to actively reduce disaster risk through reducing our exposure to hazard, reducing our vulnerabilities and enhancing our capacity to withstand hazards. This process is called Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). Families and communities that are better prepared for disasters are usually also more resilient — which means that they bounce back or recover from disasters more easily.

At school, your child learns about disaster risk, hazard, vulnerability and capacity through the following formula:

$$\text{Disaster Risk} = \frac{\text{Hazard} \times \text{Vulnerability}}{\text{Capacity of Societal System}}$$

All this may sound very technical, but it's often very simple and doesn't require too much effort. Most likely, you, your family and your community have been performing DRR without even noticing it. The following sections of the Guide introduce simple activities that can help make your house, neighbourhood and community safer from, and better prepared for, disasters. Even if no disaster is on the horizon, risk reduction and preparedness activities can be fun and can bring families and communities closer.



Children in Cagayan de Oro, Philippines, after the storm Sendong in December 2011.  
© Shutterstock/Gary Yim.

### GIVE IT SOME THOUGHT!

- What are the main hazards that your home/village/town/region face?
- Have you ever talked to your children about disasters?
- Have you ever conducted some risk reduction and preparedness activities in your home or community?
- Have you, your family or your community ever been affected by a disaster? Do you feel that you were sufficiently prepared when it happened?

## Climate Change

Most likely, you've noticed that the average temperature nowadays is higher than when you were a child. Those of you living in tropical areas may have also noticed changes in rain patterns — that rainy and dry seasons no longer take place in the months 'they were supposed to.' Conversely, those of you living in areas with four seasons may have noticed that winters and summers have become more severe and that springs and falls feel shorter. Wherever you live, you most likely have observed that the weather has become more unpredictable and extreme.

The term 'global weirding' is used to describe how climate change, or global warming, does weird things to the weather. The average temperatures have risen, and are still rising, because carbon-based human activities such as car and plane traffic, industrial processes and deforestation cause the release of carbon dioxide and other heat-trapping gasses into the atmosphere. Six of the ten hottest years worldwide (since temperature records exist) have occurred within the last decade.

A warming planet doesn't only provide challenges for humans, animals and plants, who have to adapt to warmer temperatures; it also leads to a whole range of processes that make certain natural hazards more likely or more dangerous. For example, climate change is predicted to lead to heavier rainfalls that can cause floods and landslides.

Changes in the distribution of clouds can lead to changes in rainfall, leading to drought in certain areas, which also increases the risk of forest fires. Certain storms are thought to increase in strength, too. Melting ice-caps around the pole and higher average temperatures lead to the slow rise of sea-levels, which increase coastal flooding and threaten the existence of low-lying coastal areas and islands. A warmer climate is also predicted to lead to increases in certain mosquito-borne illnesses such as dengue fever or malaria.

Climate change has different impacts around the globe. Some areas are warming faster than others. Additionally, long-term slow change is often disguised by 'normal' annual or decadal variations in our climate system.

### TIPS

- ▶ **Being aware of climate change and the predicted impacts it will have on your area will help you to be prepared for some of the different hazards your neighbourhood might be vulnerable to.**
- ▶ **It might make sense to discuss possible climate change effects in your community and incorporate them into your preparedness plans.**
- ▶ **Try to minimize your family's and community's carbon footprint by using renewable energies (solar power, wind, water, etc.), reducing unnecessary traffic, insulating your houses and by protecting and/or planting vegetation.**

## ARE DISASTERS DIFFERENT FOR WOMEN AND MEN, GIRLS AND BOYS?

When a disaster strikes, do female members of your family have the same chance of surviving it as the male members?

The way our societies are organized can make a big difference in how women and men, girls and boys survive disasters. Where we are when a disaster strikes, the safety and preparedness level of our main sites of activities (i.e., kitchen, farm, office, school, market), the kinds of warnings and help we get, the clothes we wear (i.e., long narrow skirt, trousers) as well as the skills we have (i.e., swimming, climbing) determine how well we fare when a hazard strikes. In many societies, those are different for women/girls and men/boys and leads to women and girls having lower chances to survive disasters. Here are some facts:

- In places where women have fewer social and economic rights, the number of deaths among women is higher than men.<sup>4</sup>
- In post-disaster settings, many girls and women become victims of domestic and sexual violence. Reports show that some men deal with disaster-related stress by physically abusing their wives and children. Also, women and girls living in shelters are often targeted for rape.<sup>5</sup>
- In some cases, these differences increase men's death rate in disaster situations. Many men are exposed to risky situations and even die because they believe that society expects them to take heroic rescue actions and that because they are physically stronger, they don't need to take safety precautions. For example, there were more immediate deaths among men when Hurricane Mitch struck Central America not only because men were engaged in open-air activities, but because they took fewer precautions when facing risks.

### GIVE IT SOME THOUGHT!

- **Are there inequalities, traditions or customs in your society that might put women and girls at greater risk when a disaster strikes?**
- **Do you think that in your family, girls and boys are both equally well prepared to face a disaster? If no, what do you think you can do to change that?**
- **Are girls and women included in decision-making processes when it comes to risk reduction and preparedness at home and in the community?**

### WOMEN'S STUDY: VIET NAM

Ms. T. is a poor woman who is 50 years old, living in the isolated coastal commune of Nga Bach in the province of Thanh Hoa, Viet Nam. She is a single head of household and also a person with a disability. When Storm No. 7 hit her community in 2004, her house was damaged and the roof was totally destroyed. Floods also damaged her furniture and destroyed all her food.

In 2011, she participated in several training sessions and workshops on how to deal with disasters, reduce risk and prevent diseases during floods and storms. Together with the Viet Nam Women's Union, she helped plan and organize 18 information sessions for other women in the nine villages of her community. She also participated in plays on disaster risk reduction and disease prevention.

When Storm No. 2 hit her community in 2011 the preparedness paid off. She said, "Thanks to our joint work in the commune, when the storm came, people were safe and no houses were damaged. The project changed my life and brought benefits to 30,000 people living in the three coastal communes of the district of Nga Son where I live. I was proud to have contributed a part to the success of the project and now people in my commune have gained the tools and skills to be better prepared to respond to the next storm and floods."

Adapted from: Ha Thi Kim Lien. 2012. *A Visible and Empowered Woman in Disaster Risk Reduction*. In *Recognize the Strength of Women and Girls in Reducing Disaster Risks! Stories from Vietnam*, edited by Miguel Coulier, Ian Wilderspin, and Pernille Goodall. UN Vietnam and ECHO, p. 7–8. [http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/sectoral/recognise\\_strength\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/echo/files/policies/sectoral/recognise_strength_en.pdf)

4. Neumayer and Plümper. 2007. "The gendered nature of natural disasters: the impact of catastrophic events on the gender gap in life expectancy, 1981–2002." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 97 (3). pp. 551–566. <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/3040/>

5. World Health Organization. 2005. *Violence and Disasters*. [http://www.who.int/violence\\_injury\\_prevention/publications/violence/violence\\_disasters.pdf](http://www.who.int/violence_injury_prevention/publications/violence/violence_disasters.pdf)

# How Do We Get Prepared?



In this section, we discuss things that can be done at home, at your child's school, and at the neighbourhood/community level in terms of disaster preparedness.

## PREPAREDNESS STARTS AT HOME

Family preparedness involves all members of your household. Even those who only spend a couple of hours per day at your house, or those who only come back home on the weekends, must be included, because we never know at which time of the day/week a hazard will strike.

Every member of the household should be encouraged to take part in family preparedness efforts, regardless of age and health. In particular, young children, seniors, and members of your household with disabilities should be involved.

Ask your children to take the lead in some of the preparedness activities. They learn about preparedness at school, and it's important to provide them with the opportunity to practice their skills and knowledge at home.

Getting your family and home prepared will take some of your time and some effort. Nevertheless, it's something that you and your family can easily do, and it doesn't necessarily cost any money. It can be a fun family project, and a great way to spend some quality time together. Once you've come up with a basic family preparedness plan, it doesn't require much effort to keep it updated.

The next pages explore two family disaster preparedness activities: making a family/household preparedness plan and getting emergency supplies and preparedness bags ready. Let's shut the TV down and get working!

*You never know who'll be in the house when a disaster strikes, so remember to involve everyone in the preparedness process!*

## Family/household preparedness plan

Designing a family/household preparedness plan is one of the key DRR activities. It gives each family/household member some guidance on what to do in case a hazard strikes. Remember that some hazards come without warning or leave very little reaction time (for example an earthquake or a tsunami). Having a plan helps you make the right decisions quickly.

Below are four steps to making a family/household preparedness plan. Feel free to adjust them to suit on your needs and circumstances.

### 1. GET TOGETHER

- Take your time together as a family/household, and make sure that everyone has a say.
- Get to know what a typical day looks like for each family/household member.

### 2. IDENTIFY HAZARDS AND WARNINGS

- Think of the possible hazards that may strike at the places where each family/household member perform their daily activities.
- Think of whether each family/household member will get proper warning before a hazard strikes.
- Write down the information as follows (this is known as a 'where, when, how' activity in the Student's Guide):

MONDAY				
Place	Time	Hazard	Warning	Action
School	8 am – 2 pm	Earthquake	Most likely no warning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Duck, cover and hold</li><li>■ When shaking is over, calmly and cautiously leave the school building</li><li>■ Meet up with my classmates at designated evacuation point</li></ul>
Home	2 pm – 4 pm	Tsunami	Tsunami warning sirens, radio, TV, text message	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Evacuate to hill closest to my house</li></ul>
Sports ground	4 pm – 6 pm	Floods	Sirens, word of mouth, text message	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Evacuate to higher ground on the northwest side of sports ground</li></ul>
Grandma's house	6 pm – 8 pm	Landslide	Neighbours, fire fighters; monitor hill next to grandma's house in case of very heavy rain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Evacuate through back door of grandma's house as soon as I spot warning signs for landslide</li><li>■ Warn neighbours and call Fire Department</li><li>■ Grab my and grandma's preparedness bag</li><li>■ Help grandma to evacuate</li></ul>

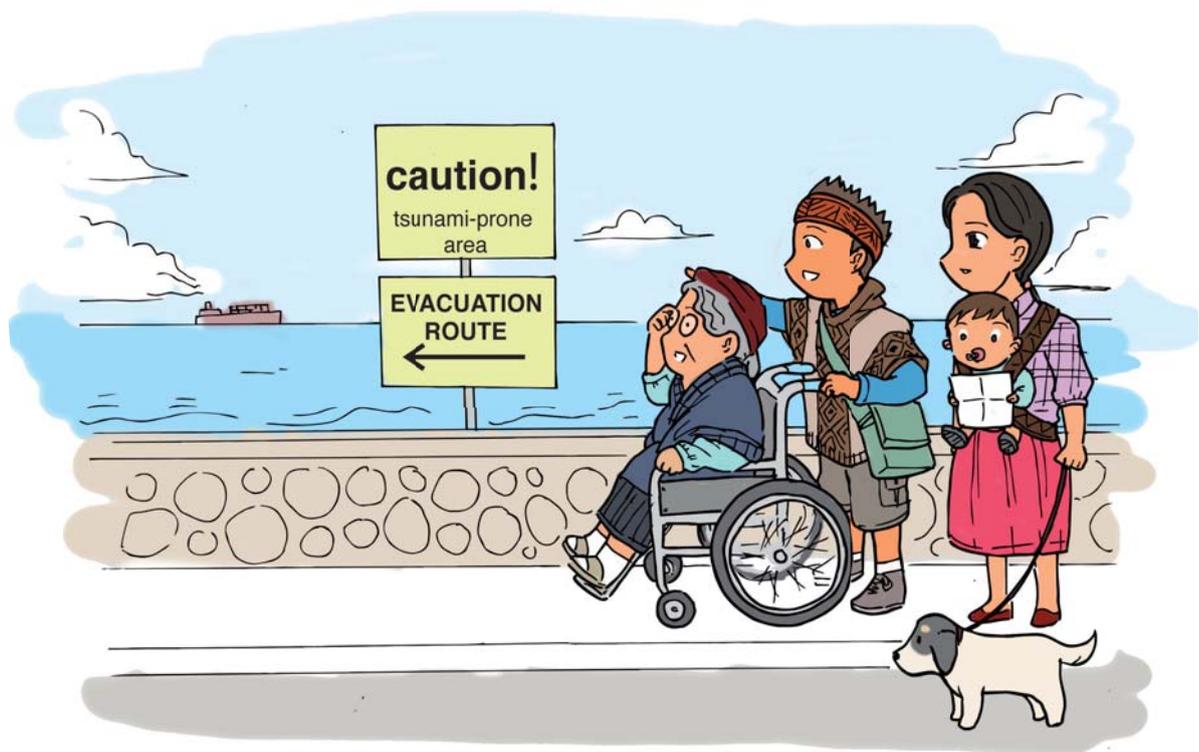
### 3. SECURE YOUR HOUSE

- Draw a map of your house. Include details such as where the main electricity box is, where gas and water lines can be shut off, and where the stove is (your child knows this as a 'risk mapping' activity).
- Check each room in your house for things that can harm you in a case of a disaster. For example, think of what could cause fire, what could fly away, what could block exits, what could fall down on you.
- Check the surroundings of your house. Think about from where a hazard may approach from. Think of things that could harm you when evacuating or even prevent you from evacuation (like trees and electric lines that could fall, rivers that could flood, bridges and roads that could become impassable, buildings that could collapse).
- Think of how safe your house and its surrounding are in different disaster scenarios. For each hazard, discuss if it's safer to stay inside or to evacuate.
- Discuss and agree on the safest evacuation routes from each room in your house and a safe meeting area outside your house. Ideally, you should have two separate routes from each spot of the house. Equally important, discuss who is responsible for helping family/household members who need assistance during evacuation.
- Post your map (with the evacuation routes) somewhere each member of the family/household can see.
- Take necessary measures to secure your house. For example, pin the book rack to the wall, move the cupboard further away from your bed and from the door, clear drains and gutters, trim the trees near your child's bedroom window, and take care of the dangling antenna or electricity cable.
- Consider coordinating your family/household preparedness plan with your neighbours.

### 4 - PREPARE

- Prepare emergency supplies and a preparedness bag (the next part talks about this in detail).
- Make a list of important phone numbers (ambulance service, fire fighters, police, relatives, neighbours, doctors...). Display the list clearly in your house and give each family/household member a copy. Save the numbers in your cellphones but have a paper copy, too.

- Make sure you and your family/household members know where any shelters in your neighbourhood/community are, as well as how to get there in an evacuation. Practice evacuating, both on foot and in vehicle, twice a year.
- Make a list of who is responsible to pick up your child from her/his places of activity and what everybody should do if pick-up isn't possible due to the situation.
- Decide where to meet or how to contact each other in case you get separated. Have your child carry a list of emergency contacts and emergency health information (blood type, allergies, etc.) at all times. Agree on a relative or friend in a different village or town that you all can contact in case you lose each other.
- Discuss what to do with your pets and/or livestock in case a disaster happens.
- Talk about what skills or knowledge (basic first aid, swimming, climbing trees/fences, climate change, fire safety) might make you safer as a family and discuss how and when you're going to acquire them.
- Review, and if needed, revise your preparedness plan once a year and after every disaster.



## Emergency supplies and preparedness bag

If a major disaster strikes, you should be prepared to go without help for a number of days until outside aid arrives. Electricity will be likely down, shops and gas stations closed and cellular/digital communication difficult or even unavailable. Consider stocking up on emergency supplies so you have enough basic goods to survive for several days in case you can't leave your house during a disaster or things are simply not available. You should also consider packing a preparedness bag, which you can bring with you in case you need to evacuate.

### EMERGENCY SUPPLIES

The International Federation of Red Cross/Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) suggests that you keep the following items stored at a secure place in or outside your house that is easily accessible in a disaster and relatively safe from hazards (for example, if your area is prone to floods, don't store them in your cellar; if your area is prone to earthquakes, consider storing them outside of your house, like in a shed or garage):<sup>6</sup>

- Emergency contact information and copies of vital documents
- Twenty-five litres (seven gallons) of water per person. This is enough for one person to survive for one week, based on an estimated two litres (half a gallon) of water per day for drinking and another two for sanitation. Include water for pets and service animals. Replace your supplies every six months
- Enough non-perishable food to last for at least seven days. Remember that infants, pets, or service animals may have different dietary needs. Check the expiry date of each pack of food every six months
- First aid kit and prescription medications
- Dust mask to filter contaminated air
- Torch/flashlight — either solar or wind-up, or with extra batteries
- Plastic bags and ties to store personal sanitation
- Liquid bleach for water purification
- Plastic sheeting and duct tape to seal windows and doors (for instance against hazardous materials)
- Paper and markers
- Multipurpose pocket knife tool
- Matches
- A whistle, to signal for help
- A telephone with extra battery or power storage
- Clothing and toiletries, including a rain gear, a change of underclothing, sturdy shoes and work gloves
- Bedding and towels
- Personal items to meet the needs of each household member including assistive devices such as spectacles

6. IFRC. 2013. *Public Awareness and Public Education for Disaster Risk Reduction: Key Messages*. p. 27. <http://www.ifrc.org/PageFiles/103320/Key-messages-for-Public-awareness-guide-EN.pdf>

## EMERGENCY OR PREPAREDNESS BAG

It's highly recommended to have an emergency or preparedness bag ready at all times in case you need to evacuate on very short notice. You can turn this into a fun family/household activity. Together, discuss what to bring and what to leave behind, whether your family/household needs more than one bag, who updates the bag (i.e., replacing food that has passed its expiry date, checking if batteries are working) and who carries the bag during evacuation. Then, pack the bag together. You can ask your child to lead this activity as she/he already learned about it at school.

The IFRC suggests a number of basic items that should be included in the emergency bag:<sup>7</sup>

- Emergency water and high-energy food
- Communication equipment such as a portable radio (solar, wind-up, or with extra batteries)
- First aid supplies and prescription medications
- Tools including a torch/flashlight, multipurpose tool, matches
- Clothing, including a rain gear, a change of underclothing, sturdy shoes and work gloves
- Emergency blanket
- Personal toiletries and items such as assistive devices
- Emergency contact information and copies of vital records
- Some cash

*Let your child lead the way  
and you will be surprised  
what she or he can do to  
assure safety!*

### TIPS

- ▶ **Don't return to your house to get your preparedness bag if it puts you at risk of injury or death.**
- ▶ **If you work outside home, it is a good idea to have another emergency bag at the workplace.**



7. IFRC. 2013. *Public Awareness and Public Education for Disaster Risk Reduction: Key Messages*. p. 27.  
<http://www.ifrc.org/PageFiles/103320/Key-messages-for-Public-awareness-guide-EN.pdf>

## SUPPORTING SCHOOL PREPAREDNESS

Your child spends a lot of time at school. As a parent, you can support school safety and preparedness in many ways:



A district level disability-inclusive evacuation drill in Ciamis, Indonesia.  
© Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund, Indonesia Office.

- **Know how safe the school building is.** If you have any doubts about the safety of your child's school building and facilities, raise the issue in parent-teacher meetings or discuss it with the school's management. Talking to other parents might also be useful. See if school management, local authorities or the community can come up with solutions to improve school safety, for example by retrofitting the building or by relocating the school if it's located in a high-risk area. In post-disaster settings, get involved in discussions about school reconstruction to make sure that the school will be built in a safe area and in accordance with disaster-resistant designs.
- **Get involved.** Consider volunteering on your child's school disaster preparedness or school safety committee. Ask school management to perform disaster preparedness drills and exercises.
- **Know your child's school emergency procedures.** Find out what the school expects you and your child to do in the event of a disaster. What are the plans and procedures in your child's school? Will your child need to be picked up if a disaster occurs? Where will the school evacuate its staff and students? What procedure will they follow should your child be injured?
- **Support your child's DRR learning.** DRR learning goes beyond classroom activities. It also takes place at home and in the community. Your child will gain the maximum knowledge, acquire practical skills and develop the right attitudes if you support her/his DRR learning activities. This can be done in several ways:
  - **Practice DRR learning at home** by becoming a prepared family that knows about and discusses disaster risks, develops a family preparedness plan, has preparedness bags ready, etc.
  - **Let your child lead the way** in family preparedness activities. Your child has learned about DRR at school, so help her/him apply that knowledge at home and in your community.
  - **Support your children's DRR assignments.** Be available if they have questions about their assignments or, for instance, if they want to interview you about disasters in your community. Just don't do their assignments for them!
  - **Attend and support school DRR events and activities.** If your child's class or school is organizing DRR activities, help out. You could supply materials, make time at home so your child can rehearse an exhibition, theatre or puppet play. Make time for DRR events, like a Disaster Risk Reduction Day, at school.
  - **Participate in community DRR activities with your child.** The next section discusses ways to make your community safer and better prepared. Again, follow your child's lead as you involve them in community DRR activities.

## BUILDING A PREPARED AND RESILIENT COMMUNITY

While preparedness and resilience start at home, they don't end there. Many crucial risk reduction, preparedness and response activities, as well as those that help cope with negative effects of climate change, can only take place at the neighbourhood and community level.

Here are a few things you can do to get some DRR activities going in your neighbourhood.

### 1. GET TOGETHER

- Find some time to sit with your neighbours and share your thoughts on spearheading DRR activities in the neighbourhood. You can make use of regular neighbourhood meetings, invite your neighbours for tea, etc.
- Identify the skills and resources that each member of the neighbourhood can bring in. Perhaps the neighbour who works at the health centre can teach everyone about first aid. Perhaps other neighbours know a local government official who is knowledgeable about the regional disaster management plan, an architect who can assess buildings' strength, or staff members of an environmental non-governmental organization (NGO).
- Make use of organizations around you. Start with youth/women/hobby groups, religious organizations, as well as sports clubs and neighbourhood associations. Reach out to schools and NGOs around you. You could even try to get local decision-makers, radio stations, and entrepreneurs on board.

*Did you know that most people saved from major disasters are rescued by relatives or neighbours within the first 24 hours before professional help arrives?*



### 2. KNOW YOUR RISKS

- Identify the various hazards that might strike your neighbourhood. Think of the hazards that had hit your neighbourhood.
- Rank the hazards by their likelihood and possible impacts. For example, you might have floods every other year, but the effects are relatively minor, while a major earthquake might be less likely, but lead to major devastation. Based on this calculation, decide together as a community which hazards are most pressing.

### 3. TAKE ACTION

- Decide who does what, when, where, and how.
- Think of people and resources from outside your community that could be brought in. Think about things that might hinder progress and discuss ways to anticipate and overcome them. Identify which skills and training you need to succeed, as well as how and when you will get those skills and training.



Children with disabilities and their families conducting an evacuation drill in Panawangan, Ciamis, West Java.  
© Arbeiter-Samariter-Bund, Indonesia Office.

## TIPS

- ▶ Be as inclusive as possible. Disasters don't discriminate, so neither should you. Make extra efforts to include those who might be more vulnerable when a disaster strikes.
- ▶ Many risk reduction and preparedness activities might have positive side effects for other sectors. Examples of those positive effects are improved agricultural harvests, better communal health, etc.
- ▶ Involve children and youth as much as possible. Encourage them to share their thoughts with their parents and to present their ideas to the community. They're the next generation and this will be great learning opportunities for them. Use their energy and creativity to find innovative solutions.
- ▶ Share your experiences with other communities in your country or even other countries.

## GIVE IT SOME THOUGHT!

- **Housing and infrastructure.** Are houses constructed to withstand local hazards? Are there building codes and if so, are they followed? Who lives in the most at-risk areas? Are public buildings that are needed for disaster response safe? Can outside aid easily reach your community in case of a disaster?
- **Food.** What kinds of food does your community eat? Where and how does your community usually get food? Which infrastructure (e.g. bridge, roads, market) does your community use to get food? How many families are struggling to meet their daily food requirements, and in those families, how many people are more vulnerable to the effects of disasters (women, elderly, children)?
- **Livelihoods.** How does your community support itself (e.g. farming, fishing, home and small businesses, factories, offices, services, etc.)? How would a disaster impact those livelihoods?
- **Resources.** What kind of natural resource does your community have (watersheds, coasts, forests, lands, etc.)? What were the impacts of past natural disasters on those resources?
- **Water and Sanitation.** Where and how does your community usually get water? What kind of infrastructure does your community use to get water? In what ways can that infrastructure be impacted by a disaster? How many families are struggling to meet their daily need for water?
- **Health.** How many members of your community have serious health problems? Identify whether there are elders, children, disabled persons or pregnant women. Identify what kind of medication or health assistance they usually need and how to get such medication in times of disaster.

## THEY DID IT FIRST

In the Philippines, following a series of school-community risk reduction workshops and the work of a school disaster management council (which was comprised of parents, teachers, children and local officials), community members worked together to replace a bridge, which had been washed away during Typhoon Reming in 2006. Located in the vicinity of the volcano Mt. Mayon, the bridge will make it easier for the community to evacuate from volcanic eruptions, typhoons or other hazards. It also has positive effects for the community, through improved communication and traffic during normal times.

Taken from: IFRC. *Public Awareness and Public Education for Disaster Risk Reduction: Key Messages*, 2013. p.27.  
<http://www.ifrc.org/PageFiles/103320/Key-messages-for-Public-awareness-guide-EN.pdf>

## HELP IS HERE: TOP TEN THINGS YOU CAN DO IN YOUR NEIGHBOURHOOD

- 1. Make a neighbourhood preparedness plan.** You and your neighbours can simply compare each other's family/household preparedness plans. Discuss how they fit together on a neighbourhood level. Identify where you can help each other out in case of a disaster.
- 2. Make disaster warning signs and mark evacuation routes.** Clear warnings help everyone from inside and outside your neighbourhood to avoid hazardous places. Mark evacuation routes, safe areas and emergency shelters so that everyone, even a stranger, knows where to go.
- 3. Organize a neighbourhood evacuation drill or disaster simulation.** Involve everybody, including elders, people with disabilities, children and pregnant women in the drill.
- 4. Organize a community clean-up.** Clean your waterways, drains and gutters to minimize flood risks from heavy downpours.
- 5. Green your neighbourhood.** Plant some trees, bushes, or mangroves to make your neighbourhood greener and to reduce your disaster risk at the same time. If you plant fruit trees or a community garden you even get a treat or products that you can sell!
- 6. Set up a food bank.** The idea is to have a community food storage that might be useful during a disaster.
- 7. Prepare for health and sanitation hazards from disasters.** Sit together and discuss on how you can prepare and share clean water and medical supplies as well as keep hygiene and sanitation standards high even after a disaster.
- 8. Get first aid training.** Invite someone (from the Red Cross/Crescent, a nurse, or a teacher, for instance) to train you in how to give first aid. This will be helpful not only in a disaster but also accidents.
- 9. Protect the environment in your neighbourhood.** Discuss how you can protect the environment in your community (for example by not burning plastic garbage, using more renewable energies, using cleaner stoves).
- 10. Check the safety of your houses.** Ask local officials to invite building inspectors to determine the safety of buildings in your community.

### THEY DID IT, So CAN YOU!

Communities in Nepal, who participated in a disaster risk reduction and livelihood program supported by the Red Cross, IFRC and the Department for International Development, faced significantly less harm than others when floods hit the area in 2007. When small villages in the Bardiya and Banke districts of Nepal were struck by floods, community members systematically evacuated from their villages, saved ten people from the water using a rope and inflatable tube, and gave first aid to 35 villagers. In one village, they used money from a revolving fund to pay for maternity care in a makeshift camp for displaced people.

Taken from: IFRC. 2013. *Public Awareness and Public Education for Disaster Risk Reduction: Key Messages*. p.27.  
<http://www.ifrc.org/PageFiles/103320/Key-messages-for-Public-awareness-guide-EN.pdf>

# How Do We Bounce Back From Disasters?



Once the storm has passed, the volcano erupted, the floodwaters receded and the earthquake stopped, it's time to start picking up the pieces and get back to 'normal' life. If you and your community were well prepared, there is a good chance that you made it through without too much damage.

Nevertheless, even the best preparedness may not be enough to withstand a massive hazard, and there are many things that may not be as they were. Destruction might still be widespread and the death toll may still be high. Your house might be destroyed or need major repairs before you can return to it and your job or your community's sources of livelihood could be gone. Your child's school might be damaged or used as an emergency shelter for displaced persons. You yourselves might be displaced.

This section discusses how you can help yourself and your family cope with the physical and psychological effects of disasters. First, we will provide some information for keeping your family safe in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, including some tips on how you as a parent can deal with the emotional after-effects. Then, we look more specifically at how you can help your child deal with the strong emotions caused by a disaster.

## HOW TO STAY SAFE AND WELL AFTER A DISASTER

Here are a couple of ideas on how to improve your and your family's safety and well-being after a disaster. They are by no means comprehensive and your circumstances might require you to do something different entirely, so remember to supplement these tips with your own research.

### KEEP YOURSELF INFORMED

- Information is one of the most important goods during and after a disaster. As electricity and phone lines might be out, having a battery powered radio is one of the safest options to receive information after a disaster.
- Know how the authorities communicate in a disaster situation and how you can reach them if needed.
- Stay close to, or together with, your social network (relatives, neighbours, community).



A father carries his daughter after tropical storm Noel in Cité Soleil, Haiti.  
© UN Photo/Logan Abassi.



A child in a camp for internally displaced people peeks through her mother's legs in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.  
© UN Photo/Logan Abassi.

- Use cellphones to send text messages instead of phoning, both to preserve battery power and to not overload the cellphone networks.
- Make sure you know where you can get help or required items like water, food, medical help, supplies, etc.
- Be wary of rumours and don't spread them: misinformation can cause confusion, potentially leading to further danger.

### BE CAREFUL

- Attend to injuries (ideally, you would have already acquired first aid skills and have basic medical supplies ready). Get professional help if needed.
- If you're sheltering at home, make sure that the hazard has passed before you leave. Every time you need to exit the house, make sure your surroundings are safe beforehand.
- Be particularly attentive to safety issues brought about by the disaster, such as damaged roads, contaminated buildings, contaminated water, gas leaks, broken glass, damaged electrical wiring, slippery floors, etc.
- Watch out for animals, particularly if they're wild animals or wounded. Don't touch or make them feel threatened.
- When you return home from your temporary shelter, make sure that your house is safe (check for loose power lines, gas leaks, structural damage and human or non-human intruders).
- If available, use gloves and wear sturdy shoes when removing debris. Wash your hands often, particularly if you work with debris.
- Be mindful of the safety of adolescent girls and women, particularly if you're in a communal shelter or displacement camp.

### BE PATIENT, BUT PERSISTENT

- Recovery is a gradual process. After a major disaster, it may take years until things are built back completely. Aid might take a while to get to your area, so having enough supplies for a couple of days is basic preparedness.
- Remember that being affected by disasters doesn't mean losing your rights. Know what your rights are, especially if you're displaced from your home. For example, access to food and water are basic human rights – it's your right to receive them in post-disaster settings, not an act of charity. If you feel that your rights have been violated, discuss it with your government ombudsman or human rights commission. You can also contact lawyers and legal aid organizations. National and international NGOs also might be able to help.

## HERE TO HELP: DEALING WITH POST-DISASTER STRESS

1. **Accept that this will be a difficult time** and that sometimes good is better than perfect.
2. **Give yourself time to grieve and heal.** You may have lost people, belongings, plans and hopes that were dear to you. Grieving and healing are processes that take time.
3. **Try to get back to a routine as soon as possible after a disaster.** Getting back to a structured daily routine is very important both for you and your family, even if the circumstances force you to embark on a completely new routine. Try to have regular meal and sleep times. Work at certain hours and play with your children at certain hours.
4. **Take care of your health.** Getting enough sleep, eating and drinking well, as well as exercising will keep your body healthy and your spirits up. Don't try to do too much at once. Set priorities and pace yourself.
5. **Don't hold yourself responsible.** Natural hazards are not your fault, don't feel guilty, and don't blame yourself.
6. **Don't feel helpless.** Try not to feel helpless if things don't go back to normal right away. Recovery from disasters is a process and it may take some time.
7. **Take some time out to relax.** Even when things are hectic after a disaster, take a couple of minutes each day for yourself to make sense of the situation and to relax. Take a walk, pray, meditate or listen to music — whatever works for you. Learn some relaxation exercises and use them in stressful situations.
8. **Talk to others.** Discuss what is affecting you and how you feel with your family, friends, colleagues or other people in your support system. You could also reach out to religious or community leaders. Remember, most likely everybody is stressed and busy, so be patient and try to be a good listener yourself, as others might need *your* support.
9. **Seek professional help.** Don't hesitate to seek help if you need it. Talk to a psychologist, religious authority, doctor or healer about your stress and worries.
10. **Your mental health is important.** Keep in mind that ignoring your stress might impact your health, which may in turn impact your ability to take care of your life and your family.

## HOW TO HELP YOUR CHILD AFTER A DISASTER

For your child, living through a disaster is likely to be scary and unsettling. The next pages talk about how children react to disasters and how parents can help.

### How children react to disasters

If your child is affected by a disaster, she/he might experience strong emotions such as being afraid, sad, worried or feeling lost and lonely. It's normal for them to have such feelings and they should be allowed them to express them. Sometimes children, particularly young ones, have difficulties expressing feelings in words and instead express them through behaviours. Some examples are:



Young boy playing after the 2005 Kashmir earthquake in Pakistan.  
© UN Photo/Evan Schneider.

- **Acting out:** Some children deal with their feelings by getting aggressive. They might quarrel or fight with classmates and siblings, stop following household or school rules or bully others.
- **Fearful:** Some children become fearful. They might be afraid of things they weren't afraid of before, or become quiet and withdrawn. Some children might even start stuttering or regress back to things they have already grown out of.
- **Feeling sick:** Some children develop what experts call 'somatic' responses. They feel headaches or bellyaches although nothing is medically wrong with them.

- **Perfectionism:** Some children try to be perfect after a disaster, obeying better than before, behaving better and performing better at school. Sometimes children do this because they think their parents have lost control of the situation and that they need to hold the family together.
- **Being anxious/restless:** Some children find it difficult to sleep, have nightmares, or have difficulties concentrating in school.
- **Older children** tend to act more and more like adults after a disaster. Some teenagers start acting more risky, including being aggressive or not listening to parents and teachers. Your teenage child might find it difficult to talk to you about her/his feelings after a disaster.

## How to help your child deal with negative feelings after a disaster

Here are eight ideas for how you can help your child deal with what they're feeling after a disaster:

### 1. PAINT THE RIGHT PICTURE

- Discuss with your child the facts about what has and will happen. Speak clearly, using words that are appropriate to your child's age. Keeping things from them may cause difficulties in the future.
- Try to correct any misunderstandings your child might have, for example about what has happened, why it happened and what will happen next.
- Give your child hope that things will get better, but don't say that everything is all right if it isn't.
- Too much media exposure about the disaster might have a negative effect on your child. Try to protect her or him from shocking images that might be traumatic.
- The 'What happened' exercise (page 24) might be helpful.

### 2. STAY TOGETHER

- Assure your child that he or she is safe. Provide feelings of comfort and safety.
- Hug your child more often, spend more time together at bedtime, be close by at night in case of nightmares.
- Don't send your child away. After a disaster, children feel particularly vulnerable and are afraid to be abandoned. Being sent away might be traumatic.

### 3. LISTEN

- Take the time to listen and talk to your child. Give him or her the time and space to express feelings and thoughts about the disaster.
- Offer nonverbal ways of expression, too, like drawing or puppetry. Talk about your own feelings to encourage your child to share.
- Underline that it's okay to be sad. Allow your child to grieve for persons, animals or belongings that you may have lost.
- Regardless of your child's age or sex, reassure them that it's okay to be sad and to cry after a disaster.
- Don't force your child to talk or listen if she or he doesn't want to.
- The 'Sharing feelings' and 'Relaxation' exercises (pages 24 and 27) might be helpful.

### 4. GET A RHYTHM

- Get back to chores, bath time and bedtime routines as soon as possible, even if the circumstances are very different than before the disaster. Having a routine helps create a sense of normalcy.

*Every child will react a bit differently to a disaster. Be patient, and adapt to what your family's specific needs and circumstances are. There's no wrong answer!*

- Get your child back to school as soon as possible so that he or she can get back into a routine and share thoughts and feelings with friends. It will also allow you more time to focus on getting your life back together. Find out if the school has activities that help your child deal with emotions caused by the disaster
- The 'Making a schedule' exercise (page 27) might be helpful.

## 5. ACCEPT BEHAVIOUR CHANGES

- Your child might communicate distress by changing her/his behavior, for example by acting out or regressing.
- Even if it's difficult to handle, be understanding and don't take these things personally.
- If your child's difficult behaviour continues (particularly if it turns violent or self-destructive) for a while, talk to your child's teacher or consult with a psychologist.



## 6. PLAY

- Give your child enough space and time to playfully deal with stress. Playing is a very therapeutic activity for your child.
- Take some time to play with your child.

A boy jump ropes at a camp for displaced persons after the January 2010 earthquake in Haiti. © UN Photo/Logan Abassi.

## 7. REBUILD TOGETHER

- Engage your child in clean-up and reconstruction planning and activities.
- Older children can lend a hand in community activities. Involving them will make them feel empowered and validated.
- Make sure that the activities are age-appropriate and safe, and that they don't interfere with your child's schooling and playing needs.
- Discuss and organize preparedness measures in case another disaster strikes (particularly if there are aftershocks after an earthquake).
- The 'Setting goals' exercise (page 26) might be helpful.

## 8. I LOVE YOU

- Tell your children often that you love them.

## Psychosocial activities for families<sup>8</sup>

You don't need to be a trained psychologist to help your child to deal with post-disaster stress and trauma. Here are a couple of activities and exercises that you can do with your child after a disaster. The Student's Guide also discusses expressive psychosocial activities, such as puppetry, theatre plays, songs, letter writing and drawing.

### WHAT HAPPENED?

One important thing to do after a disaster is to talk about what happened. This gives your child the chance to make sense of the events and gives you a chance to deal with any misperceptions. It might be difficult for your child to coherently tell the story; this exercise might be helpful to guide them through the process.

- Have each family member sit comfortably in a circle.
- Tell your child that you're going to talk about what happened during the disaster and that everybody is going to share their story.
- Ask everybody to share their stories. Ask them to describe what they experienced through their different senses. Ask what they smelled, heard, tasted, saw, touched/felt?
- Make sure your child understand that it's okay for different people to have different impressions and stories. Validate your child's stories and correct any misperceptions if necessary.
- To end the activity on a positive note, you can repeat the exercise with sharing stories about a nice family event in the past, like a visit to the zoo or a family celebration.

### SHARING FEELINGS

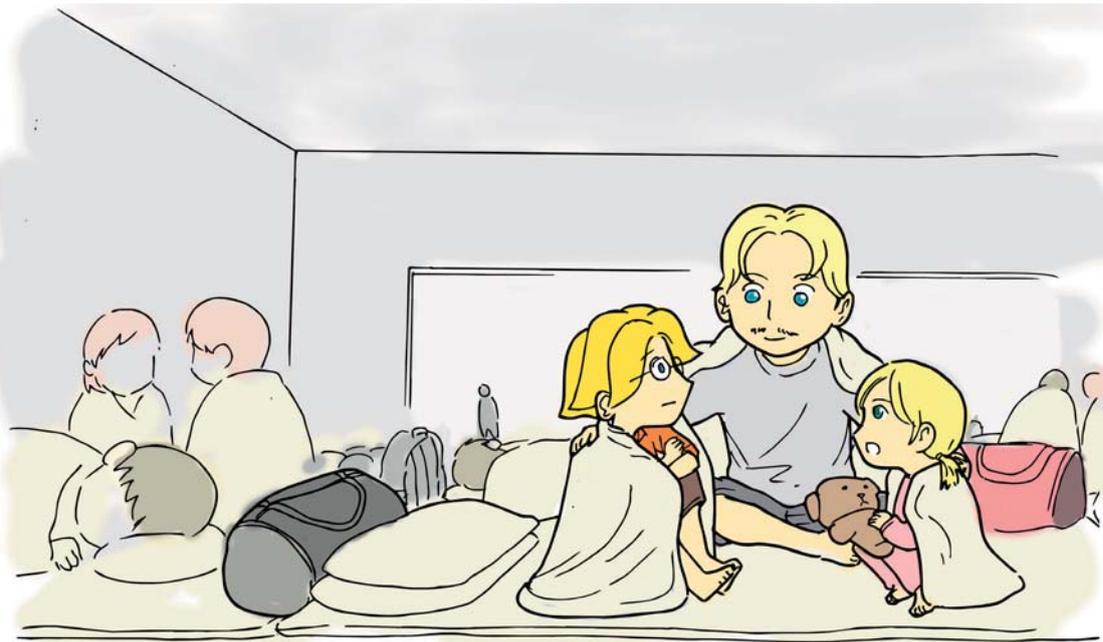
Expressing feelings can be a crucial first step in dealing with negative feelings. Remember that children who don't have channels to express their feelings might act them out through various ways as discussed earlier. Here is an exercise to encourage your child to share his or her feelings.

- Sit together as a family in a circle.
- Go around and ask everyone to tell one thing that is the same with everybody in the family (this could be hair colour, certain clothes, favourite food).
- Then go around and ask everybody to name something that is different for everybody in the family (try to come up with funny things).
- Now, go around the circle and ask everybody to share a feeling they've had since the disaster. Find out if members of your family had similar feelings or different ones.
- Thank everyone for sharing and encourage them to talk about their feelings with each other whenever they feel they need to.
- You can also discuss what everybody does and can do when they experience negative feelings. Think of ways to help a family member cope with negative feelings (this could be talking to another family member, offering hugs, playing a certain game, drawing a picture, writing a personal journal, etc.).

8. Adapted from: Gurwitch, Robin S and Messenbaugh, Anna K. 2005. *Healing After Trauma Skills*. University of Oklahoma. [http://www.nctsn.org/nctsn\\_assets/pdfs/edu\\_materials/HATS2ndEdition.pdf](http://www.nctsn.org/nctsn_assets/pdfs/edu_materials/HATS2ndEdition.pdf)



Children attend school in a temporary camp for Pakistanis displaced by heavy floods in Jamshoro, Sindh Province.  
© UN Photo/Amjad Jamal/WFP.



## SETTING GOALS

As your life starts to get back to a new normal, activities with your child should not only focus on what happened, but on developing a positive perspective towards your child's and your family's future. It's important to recognize positive events every day during the recovery process and how they point towards a better future. This activity helps you and your child set goals.

- Sit together with your child.
- Note that times have been difficult and that everybody has had to deal with negative emotions and stress after the disaster.
- Brainstorm with your child about some of the positive things that have happened since the disaster. Underline that for things to get even better, there is a need to set goals.
- You have three wishes. Ask your child to think about and share what three things she or he would wish for.
- Acknowledge her/his wishes. Explain that we need to work to make wishes come true, and that sometimes wishes can be achieved with the help of others.
- Ask your child to think about and write down three short-term wishes/goals (for the next few days/weeks) and three long-term wishes/goals (for the next few months/year). Provide some examples yourself. This could be something as simple as wishing to read a certain book or redoing the garden.
- Ask your child to think of how to achieve his or her wishes/goals and who will be able to help. Ask how you can help to make these wishes/goals come true.
- Put the wish list somewhere that can be easily seen by each member of the family. Together with your child, monitor the progress of completing the wish list. If your child achieves a wish/goal, offer congratulations and put a checkmark, star or sticker next to it.

## MAKING A SCHEDULE

Depending on how you were affected, your life might be very different than it was before. Your house and/or your child's school might be damaged, or you and your family may be displaced. Having a daily routine allows your child to get a sense of safety and order during those hectic and tumultuous times following a disaster. Here are some steps that you can take to create a new routine with your child.

- Sit together with your child or with the whole family.
- Ask everybody to identify what has changed and what has stayed the same in their daily activities.
- Develop a basic routine for each family member and write it down. This should include play times as well as chores, work, bedtimes, etc.
- Pin everybody's routine up in each room or a communal room such as the kitchen or living room.
- Revise the routine after a while if things change.

## RELAXATION

Done regularly, simple relaxation exercises can be a good way of dealing with stress. Relaxation exercises might not come naturally to everyone, therefore practicing it regularly will improve the effect of these exercises. Relaxation exercises usually have some or all of three components: breathing, visualization and physical movement.

1. Discuss the symptoms of stress with your children. Talk about what happens when we're tense and stressed (heart rate increases, muscles tensions, headaches, woozy, lack of sleep).
2. Ask your children what triggers their post-disaster stress (memories, smells, certain sounds, aftershocks).
3. Tell your children that relaxation exercises can be very helpful in a situation when stress and negative emotions seem to overwhelm us. Emphasize that relaxation needs to be learned, just like any other activity.
4. Follow these steps to do the exercise:
  - Ask your children to think of their favourite colour or a colour that makes them happy.
  - Ask your children to close their eyes and visualize that colour.
  - Now ask your children to breathe in slowly and deeply through the nose and exhale through the mouth.
  - Repeat breathing in and out a couple of times until your children have a good rhythm.
  - Ask your children to imagine that every time they breathe in, the air is their favorite colour.
  - Tell your children to feel how that colourful air enters their nose, lungs and then the whole body, bringing positive feelings and positive energy.
  - Repeat several times.
  - Ask your children to relax their whole body, while breathing in and breathing out. Ask them to focus on their breathing and on how relaxed they are.
  - Ask your children to slowly start wiggling their toes and fingers and then arms and legs before opening their eyes. Allow them some time to 'wake up'.

## TIPS

- ▶ Your children may also learn this exercise at school (see the Teacher's Guide). If they do, you can ask them to lead the exercise for the whole family.
- ▶ Think about how you could include relaxation exercises into your regular daily schedule.
- ▶ There are many relaxation exercises, pick one that is culturally appropriate for your country/region.
- ▶ Relaxation exercises can also be coupled with prayers and/or meditation.
- ▶ This exercise can be done while standing up, seated or lying down.
- ▶ Think of playing some calming music throughout the exercise.

# Conclusion

We hope that this Guide has been useful for you, your child and your community. Circumstances can be very different from one country to the next, from one region to the next, and even from one neighbourhood to the next. This Guide is simply a starting point for you, your family and your community to get on the path to safety, preparedness and resilience.

It may be useful to think of disasters as a disease: a little bit of prevention is much cheaper and less painful than buying and swallowing a lot of medicine. The problem is that when prevention works, we don't appreciate it as much as we should, because we don't know what would've happened without prevention. Disasters give us a unique opportunity to see that preparedness and prevention work, as we can compare what happens to communities that are investing time and energy in reducing risks and getting prepared and to others that don't.

As discussed in this Guide, simple activities go a long way to significantly reduce your family's and community's risk. A lot of information on risk reduction, preparedness and resilience is available. Search the Internet or ask your government, the Red Cross/ Crescent local offices as well as national and international NGOs.

Let your child be the star of risk reduction and preparedness activities. If we educate the next generation well, they will be able to safeguard the environment and create safer communities than what we have now. Remember that your child looks up to you: you can be a role model for reducing risks and being prepared.

*Be prepared. Stay safe!*



United Nations  
Educational, Scientific and  
Cultural Organization

Education  
Sector

## A Parent's Guide to Disaster Risk Reduction

# STAY SAFE AND BE PREPARED

This guide is part of a three-book Compendium on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) that aims to introduce concepts, exercises and best practices on disaster preparedness and response to teachers, students and parents.

The Compendium is based on the belief that comprehensive disaster preparedness and resilience-building is most successful when the whole (school) community, starting with students, parents and teachers, is involved and when the process actively encourages students to take the lead on some activities.

This Parent's Guide provides ideas to initiate family preparedness measures and helps parents to get engaged with their child's school and their community to improve disaster preparedness and response. It also addresses the psychosocial well-being of children and introduces several exercises that parents can do to support the psychosocial recovery of their child after a disaster.

# BECOME A DISASTER-WISE PARENT



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