

# Fact Sheet: Recognizing Symptoms of Stress in Kids After a Disaster

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Everyone in Puerto Rico was affected by Hurricane Maria. As a caregiver, it is not only important to recognize symptoms of stress but also to help your child manage stress.

Here are a few signs to help recognize if your child or adolescent is suffering from stress.

Younger Children:

- Refusal to go to school or other unusual activities
- Persistent disobedience or aggression
- Threatens to harm oneself

Pre-Adolescents and Adolescents:

- Depression shown by sustained, prolonged negative mood and attitude
- Poor appetite, difficulty sleeping or thoughts of self-harm

Managing Emotional Stress after a Disaster

The emotional stress caused from the impacts of a disaster's aftermath can be felt for many months thereafter. The destruction of homes and separation from family and friends can create a substantial amount of stress and anxiety for children. We can't always control the things that cause stress, but we can control how we cope with stress. This is called stress management. One of the most important things caregivers can do is model healthy coping skills. This means using stress management skills in your day-to-day life and helping your child practice these skills. Here are some tips to help you help your child manage stress after the hurricane:



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- **Healthy Lifestyle:** A healthy lifestyle, including healthy eating, physical activity, and good sleep habits, are good for everyone.
- **Problem Solving:** Working your way through problems is a helpful way to manage stress.
- **Allowing children to guide the conversation:** Allow space for your child to share their experiences. Ask how they feel and what has changed for them, but do not force them to relive a traumatic experience. Let their questions guide the conversation, you may be surprised about what they find concerning.
- **Make a routine:** Even if school and work routines have changed, you can make a new routine. This gives children a sense of structure and familiarity.
- **Reassure Children:** Spend extra time with them. Ensure them that their family is there to protect and help them through the changes.
- **Treat your child in an age appropriate manner:** A young child may not be able to understand the full scope of the disaster or potential problems. Listen to their concerns and address them in ways they can understand. On the other hand, teenagers will likely understand the disaster and far reaching effects it may have on their lives. Be honest, whatever the age of your child, make sure you make it clear you will provide the support, help and information they need.
- **Fun, relaxation and time for friends:** These are always important, but are particularly important if your child is experiencing a lot of stress. Encourage your child to participate in fun activities they enjoy, spend time with friends, or try relaxation exercises like mindfulness, visualization, or deep breathing. Keep in mind, however, that over-scheduling your child in too many activities may add to their stress.

No matter who needs help, if you or a loved one feel overwhelmed or are considering self-harm, please call crisis counseling at Linea PAS 1-800-981-0023. It is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Want more specific information and guidance? Please visit the links below.

General preparedness and coping:

- <https://www.fema.gov/children-and-disasters>

Advice for children experiencing trauma due to a storm:



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- [http://www.redcross.org/images/MEDIA\\_CustomProductCatalog/m14740422\\_Helping\\_children\\_Spanish.pdf](http://www.redcross.org/images/MEDIA_CustomProductCatalog/m14740422_Helping_children_Spanish.pdf) (only available in Spanish)
- <https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/translated-safety-and-crisis-resources>
- [http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/after\\_the\\_hurricane\\_helping\\_young\\_children\\_Spanish.pdf](http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/assets/pdfs/after_the_hurricane_helping_young_children_Spanish.pdf) (only available in Spanish)

Advice For Specific Age Groups: (only available in Spanish)

- [http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/pfa/spanish/apendice\\_e4\\_bebes.pdf](http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/pfa/spanish/apendice_e4_bebes.pdf)
- [http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/pfa/spanish/apendice\\_e5\\_preescolar.pdf](http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/pfa/spanish/apendice_e5_preescolar.pdf)
- [http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/pfa/spanish/apendice\\_e6\\_escolar.pdf](http://www.nctsn.org/sites/default/files/pfa/spanish/apendice_e6_escolar.pdf)

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Disaster recovery assistance is available without regard to race, color, religion, nationality, sex, age, disability, English proficiency or economic status. If you or someone you know has been discriminated against, call FEMA toll-free at 800-621-3362 (voice, 711/VRS - Video Relay Service.) Multilingual operators are available (Press 2 for Spanish). TTY call 800 -462-7585.

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