

FS2094 (April 2023)



# Ideas for Helping Kids Deal with Flood-Related Stress

Sean Brotherson, Family Science Specialist

## Ideas for Helping Children

There are a variety of strategies that parents or other adults can use in helping children deal with stress due to flood conditions. These may include:

- **Provide comfort and reassurance with your presence.** Children naturally seek the comfort and security that comes from being around others who give them reassurance. Give children extra hugs, smiles and personal attention. Set aside time just to sit next to a child, put your arm around them, or talk with them about their feelings.
- **Give children verbal reassurance.** It is important for children to hear messages of support. Remember to tell them often that you love them, that everything will work out and that they are taken care of.
- **Ask each child to share his or her own thoughts and feelings.** Listen. Parents and adults can help children by encouraging their expression of feelings and listening carefully to them. Ask them to tell you if they feel scared, angry or frustrated. Help them realize such feelings are normal and that they can be worked out. Ask them for their ideas on how they might help with family needs or service.
- **Read books together that involve dealing with challenges.** A very effective technique is to buy, check out or borrow books that show children or families dealing with challenges and overcoming them. These may be books about dealing with floods or other challenges. Ask children what they think about the characters and how they respond. Compare your own situation. Read books several times or leave them out for children to look at.
- **Use humor to lighten circumstances.** Laugh. Laugh some more! Humor, smiles and laughter relieve tension, especially for children.
- **Have children write or tell a story or draw a picture about the family experience.** Children often express emotion and deal with stressful situations through play or expressive behavior. Ask children to tell you a story about the moisture problems, or help them write a story about it. Record this and read it back to them. You may also have children draw pictures about the experience. Ask them about the picture and what it means.
- **Establish and maintain consistent routines that provide security and familiarity to children.** As much as possible, adults should create and maintain some routines that children can rely on for security. This might include a particular routine at lunch, nap time, dinner or bed time. It might involve reading stories each night, rough-and-tumble playing, or playing family games. Use these times to build security and reassure children. Churches or schools might have an open house a couple of nights a week for children or families to play games and have refreshments.

**P**arents and other adults play significant roles in helping children who are dealing with stress. They provide an example for children, act as a resource in helping children cope, and give guidance and support in managing emotions. Trying to return to a “normal” routine after moisture problems occur can be difficult since some of these problems may last for days or weeks.

However, parents and other adults need to be attentive to children’s needs in helping them overcome fears or re-establish a sense of security. Parents and other adults tend to set the atmosphere that will help children cope or remain overly stressed.

If children have been displaced from a home, school or other familiar location due to flood-related conditions, it is important to establish a sense of normalcy and security for them as quickly as possible. Most children are highly resilient, and attentiveness to their needs will result in reduced levels of stress or anxiety.

NDSU

EXTENSION



## Resources

For more details about dealing with stress and other information to aid in disaster response and recovery, visit the NDSU Extension disaster response Web site at: <https://www.ndsu.edu/agriculture/ag-hub/ag-topics/disasters>

- **Help children express and cope with grief or feelings of loss.** Some children may have lost valued items or toys due to moisture damage. It is natural for them to feel a sense of loss. Allow children to express their loss or frustration, and acknowledge the reality of their feelings. Plan to replace a lost object if appropriate.
- **Develop a plan with children for action to take in case of future problems or stress.** Children feel empowered if they know beforehand what might be done to respond to continuing concerns. This may include a clear explanation of upcoming plans, knowledge of contact information for safety experts or simply greater understanding of potential weather-related concerns such as thunderstorms. Discuss such issues with children and involve them in making plans that will aid in responding to future challenges. Practice response procedures so children are familiar with them.
- **Involve children in clean-up or repair activities as appropriate.** It can be helpful to give children something to do in responding to stress. Children benefit from feeling that they are making a contribution. As possible, find an appropriate activity that children or youth can do to help clean up, repair or otherwise assist with responding to the situation. Perhaps they can perform a service activity for others in need.
- **Show an example of self-control and positive response to stress.** Children learn how to respond to stress by watching adults. Adults ought to set an example of self-control, maturity and positive resolution in dealing with challenges. This will comfort children and create a secure atmosphere for them.
- **Provide opportunities to re-connect with peers or other families.** Children may worry about friends or peers they know in school, church or the community. If contact information is available, a parent or community program might set up occasional get-together opportunities for children and youth to re-connect with peers, such as at a movie night or other activity.
- **Personal space is often lost or diminished due to moisture stress.** Children may have been required to move from a familiar home, school or classroom. If possible, provide some type of personal space, even if small, where a child can keep things important to them. A church may provide a regular study space for homework for children in a new school setting, for example.
- **Ask kids directly what they would like and need.** Children and youth who are allowed to share their perspective can share great feedback on what is important to them. Ask them directly what support or resources might be helpful to them. Respond as possible based on the conditions you are in and the resources available.

NDSU Extension does not endorse commercial products or companies even though reference may be made to tradenames, trademarks or service names. NDSU encourages you to use and share this content, but please do so under the conditions of our Creative Commons license. You may copy, distribute, transmit and adapt this work as long as you give full attribution, don't use the work for commercial purposes and share your resulting work similarly. For more information, visit [www.ag.ndsu.edu/agcomm/creative-commons](http://www.ag.ndsu.edu/agcomm/creative-commons).

## For more information on this and other topics, see [www.ndsu.edu/extension](http://www.ndsu.edu/extension)

County commissions, North Dakota State University and U.S. Department of Agriculture cooperating. NDSU does not discriminate in its programs and activities on the basis of age, color, gender expression/identity, genetic information, marital status, national origin, participation in lawful off-campus activity, physical or mental disability, pregnancy, public assistance status, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, spousal relationship to current employee, or veteran status, as applicable. Direct inquiries to Vice Provost for Title IX/ADA Coordinator, Old Main 201, NDSU Main Campus, 701-231-7708, [ndsu.eoaa@ndsu.edu](mailto:ndsu.eoaa@ndsu.edu). This publication will be made available in alternative formats for people with disabilities upon request, 701-231-7881. 750-4-23