



## 10 Ideas to Help Children Cope With Natural Disasters

While hundreds of thousands of children will be directly effected by the devastation of the earthquake in Haiti, children everywhere will experience distress as they hear of people who have suffered and watch displaced people on TV. Parents and other adults can take steps to help children cope with their fears and live with hope.

Here are 10 suggestions.

1. Allow children to express their concerns through art work and play.
2. Pray with children for those affected by the earthquake.
3. Limit the amount of television coverage of the disaster children watch.
4. Give children something concrete to do, for example let children help purchase and assemble health kits, layette, or flood buckets. See <http://new.gbgm-umc.org/umcor/getconnected/supplies> for information on how to assemble kits.
5. Develop a family disaster plan for the types of natural disasters that may happen in your area. Role play some possible situations. Knowing that you are prepared will help children cope with fears that they may find themselves separated from family in the event of a disaster.
6. Talk with children about what has happened, helping them to identify their feelings. Ask them what they have heard about the disaster from other children. Sometimes children have heard wildly inaccurate information from their peers that needs to be corrected to alleviate fears that have no basis in reality.
7. Discuss openly with children what your family and church are doing to help those who have been hurt by the disaster.
8. Older children may find it helpful to write about what they are feeling. Suggest keeping a journal on paper or computer.
9. Let children use puppets to express feelings.
10. Do a low-key activity together such as assembling a puzzle, playing a board game, or baking cookies that creates spaces for children to talk. Children often find it easier to talk about important things while their hands are engaged in something else.