

Caring for Children During and After a Flood

Children need a lot of support during emergencies. Parents and other caregivers must watch them closely for signs of fear or stress as children may not be able to effectively communicate how they feel. It may be hard for them to completely understand the impact of a flood, but they will sense and respond to the tension around them.

Make children feel as safe and protected as possible. They generally recover well from the impact of a flood, especially with the help of caring and supportive adults.

A little extra attention can help

- If you find it hard to talk when your child wants your attention, try giving them a hug and saying, “This is really hard for us.”
- Try to recognize the feelings causing your child’s actions and talk about them. It can help to say something like, “I can see you are feeling really sad about this.”
- Some children may have a great fear that they can’t find the words to talk about it. For example, if your child’s friend loses their house during a flood, you might say something like, “You may be scared that something will happen to us, too. We are safe here.”
- Be honest with your child about what is happening and what it means.
- Don’t deny the seriousness of the situation.
- Let your child know it is ok to cry.
- Be aware of what is said in front of your child about the flood or your circumstances (ex: news broadcasts, adult conversations).
- Your child may have an increased need to be physically near you. When this isn’t possible, find someone who makes your child feel secure while you are away.
- If you have to leave even briefly during the flood, you may need to make sure your child knows that you will return. Even when the real threat has ended, it may take some time for your child to feel secure when separated from you. This is a normal reaction and will lessen over time.
- Plan activities your child can do to help with the flood efforts (ex: make cookies or sandwiches for sandbag volunteers).
- Spend extra time with your child when possible to help them feel secure.
- Read children’s books about similar emergencies and use them to help your child talk about their feelings and fears.

Extra support at bedtime may be needed

- As much as possible, follow usual bedtime routines (ex: bath and story time) to help your child feel normal and safe.
- It may help your child settle down if you stay near while they fall asleep. (When the emergency is over go back to your old routine gradually. At first say that you will check on them in two minutes to make sure they are okay, and continue lengthening the check-back time until your child feels secure again.)
- Some children feel better if a night light is left on for them.
- Brothers and sisters may want to sleep in the same area until they feel more secure again.
- If you are evacuated from your home try to bring your child's most important personal, familiar items such as a favourite stuffed animal, blanket or pillow.

Get back to normal as soon as possible

- It may take a while for your child and you to resolve all of the painful feelings caused by the emergency, so be patient.
- It's normal for a child to talk about the flood long afterwards and often when you least expect it. Don't stop them from talking about it.
- If you have concerns about your child's reaction to the flood, get professional support for both of you.

Some children may have extreme reactions that continue for several weeks. If these reactions continue, get help from outside resources. For example, watch if your child:

- re-experiences flood events (ex: nightmares, flashbacks)
- avoids things connected with the flood
- withdraws from others and appears to be numb or shutting down
- continually cries
- shows extreme anxiety, jumpiness, sleep difficulties, irritability, poor concentration
- shows little or no interest in usual activities

Use outside support and resources when you need them

If you, your family, friends or neighbours are having a particularly hard time dealing with stress, get help from trained professionals.

- Health Links – Info Santé can help you find resources through your local regional health authority or community mental health services office. 24-hours a day, 7 days a week. 204-788-8200 (in Winnipeg) 1-888-315-9257 (toll free outside Winnipeg)
- Triple P Parent Line has numerous resources. 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. weekdays (after hours, leave a message & contact number for a call back) 204-945-4777 (in Winnipeg) 1-877-945-4777 (toll free outside Winnipeg) Or visit the website at <http://www.manitobaparentzone.ca/parent-or-caregiver/toddlers/parenting-resources/triplep-positive-parenting-program.html>
- Manitoba Farm, Rural and Northern Support Services Line 10 a.m. to 9 p.m. weekdays 1-866-367-3276 (toll free throughout Manitoba) Or visit the website at <https://supportline.ca/>
- Klinik Community Health Centre provides counselling and referrals for all Manitobans. 24-hour Crisis Line, 7 days a week. 204-786-8686 (in Winnipeg) 1-888-322-3019 (toll free outside Winnipeg) Or visit the website at <https://klinik.mb.ca/crisis-support/>
- The Manitoba Suicide Line is available to all Manitobans. 24-hours a day, 7 days a week. 1-877-435-7170 (toll free throughout Manitoba) Or visit the website at www.reasonolive.ca