



FEMA

# Fact Sheet

## Keeping Children Safe after Hurricane Harvey

This is a difficult time for those who have had to evacuate their homes as well as for those who have been able to return and see the damages to their homes.

Although Hurricane Harvey has passed, there are still many hazards to be mindful of as a result of the extensive damage left in its wake. Flooding is the most common natural disaster in the U.S., and causes billions of dollars in damage each year for families and businesses.

It is important for parents and guardians to follow the recommendations below in order to keep their children safe and at ease through the wait and associated cleanup.

## Addressing the Emotional Impacts of a Disaster

The amount of damage caused from a disaster can be overwhelming, the destruction of homes and separation from family and friends can create a great amount of stress and anxiety for children. It is important not to overlook how this storm affects the children who live in these areas and who have lost their pets, favorite toys, or other cherished treasures. They may not fully understand what is going on.

To help children recover or cope with the situation, here are some helpful tips to make them feel safe again:

- **Limit TV Time:** Intense media coverage of disasters can frighten young children and disturb teenagers as well.
- **Keep To A Routine:** Help your children feel as if they still have a sense of structure, which can make them feel more at ease or provide a sense of familiarity. When schools and child care open again, help them to return to normal activities including going back to class, sports and play groups.
- **Make Time for Them:** Help kids to understand that they are safe and secure by talking, playing and doing other family activities with them. To help younger children feel safe and calm, read a favorite book or have a relaxing family game or activity.

Don't forget that it's all right to ask them questions about the situation. Spend some time talking to them about the events, let them know it is okay to ask questions and to share their worries and reactions to the situation. It is also good to let children know, without overwhelming them with information, what is happening in the family, with their school, and in the community.

Parents and guardians should answer questions briefly and honestly and ask their children for

their opinions and ideas. Visit [nctsn.org/trauma-types/natural-disasters](https://nctsn.org/trauma-types/natural-disasters) for more ideas on how to reassure children they are safe.

Here is some information to help you prepare for future disaster events:

### **Flood Water Safety**

- **Constantly watch your children** to prevent playing in or around floodwaters. It doesn't take long and it doesn't take much water for children to drown. In many cases, children who drowned had been out of sight less than five minutes and were in the care of one or both parents at the time.
- **Know where the ground is exposed** and keep children from playing around drainage ditches, ways or storm drains as they can fall in, get stuck, or cause a drowning hazard.
- **Be aware of what's in the water** as children playing in contaminated standing water can become sick or be bitten by snakes, rodents and other wildlife.
- **Watch for live wires or power sources** as electricity from streetlights and downed power lines may be active. Children who come into contact with these power sources, whether through standing water or direct contact can be given a deadly shock.
- Learn more online at [www.ready.gov/floods](https://www.ready.gov/floods).

### **Power Outage Safety**

- **Lock the door.** Many people filled their bathtubs and buckets with water to use for drinking or washing. Keep everything in one bathroom and lock it off from toddlers who might climb in. This can pose a drowning hazard.
- **Be mindful if using candles.** Batteries may start to run out and people may resort to using candles. Make sure to watch small children around them and don't forget to blow them out.
- **Turn off vehicles.** In order to recharge cell phones and other electronics, people may run their cars in order to use car chargers. Be sure children don't climb in the car and shift it into gear.
- **Leave it out in the open.** If you have a gas/propane powered generator never run it in the basement or closed garage.
- Learn more online at [www.redcross.org/prepare/disaster/power-outage](https://www.redcross.org/prepare/disaster/power-outage).

### **Fun for Children**

- **Board games:** Pick games that don't end too quickly. Candy Land, Chutes and Ladders, and Monopoly are great games to play at any age. Even cards games such as Go Fish, War or Concentration can bring hours of fun.

- **Musical Chairs:** If you have power and three or more children you can play a game of musical chairs. Bean bags, folded blankets or pillows can be used as chairs if space is limited.
- **Simon Says:** A game of Simon Says helps children work on their listening skills and can help relieve some of the energy that's bottled up inside.
- **Exercise:** Include activities kids may do in gym class, including jump rope, push-ups, jumping jacks and stretching exercises. This is great for expelling energy for those kids who are stuck indoors.
- **Build a fort:** Pile up those pillows and blankets, and let them build their fantasy fort freely. This could relieve their stress, and yours.
- **Draw or paint:** Every child, young or old, enjoys being creative.

### Useful Links

- [www.ready.gov/coping-with-disaster](http://www.ready.gov/coping-with-disaster)
- Save the Children: go to [www.savethechildren.org](http://www.savethechildren.org) and search “Tips to Help Kids Cope with Disasters.”
- American Academy of Pediatrics: go to [www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org) and search
  - “Helping your Child Cope”
  - “Talking to Children about Disasters”
  - “How Children of Different Ages Respond to Disasters”
  - “How to Prevent Carbon Monoxide Poisoning” and
  - “Flash Flood Recovery”.
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network: [www.nctsnet.org](http://www.nctsnet.org)