

Talking Points For Helping Students After A Tornado

Being in a tornado can be very frightening. For days, weeks, and even months after the storm students may be very anxious and stressed. Children may react differently to the aftermath depending on their age, developmental level, and prior experiences. Their reaction is typically influenced by how their parents, teachers, and other caregivers cope with the situation. These traumatic effects may diminish with time or continue to affect them for years to come. This document has been developed in order to offer some suggestions of what to look for and how you can support your children, friends, and family.

Common Reactions

- feelings of anxiety, fear, and worry about safety of self and others (including pets)
- increased fears and worries about separation from family members
- fears about another tornado coming
 - this may increase during times of bad weather
- changes in behavior, which could look like...
 - increased activity level
 - decreased concentration, decreased attention
 - increased irritability
 - withdrawal from social situations and/or usual activities
 - anger outbursts
 - aggressive episodes
- increased physical complaints (e.g., headaches, stomachaches, aches and pains)
- changes in school or work performance
- reliving the event – some people may repeatedly talking about it. Younger kids may relive it by “playing” the event (e.g., “I’m the tornado and I’m going catch you!”), or playing with toys where a tornado becomes part of the narrative)
- increased sensitivity to sound
- changes in sleep
- regressive behaviors in younger children (e.g., bedwetting, tantrums, baby talk)
- increased chance of high-risk behaviors, especially in teens (e.g., drinking, substance abuse, self-injurious behaviors)
- school phobia or severe anxiety about coming to school

How Can You Help Others?

- ✓ Take care of yourself first! – you will be better able to help others if you are able to manage your feelings in a healthy way.
- ✓ Remain calm and reassuring – others, especially children, will take cues from you on how emotional you are about the situation. Reassure them that the school, family, and friends will take care of them and over time things will get better
- ✓ Encourage your children to come to school every day
- ✓ Get them back in a predictable routine – provide structure and have specific routines in place to provide support and consistency. Predictability typically lessens anxiety
- ✓ Acknowledge and normalize most feelings - be open to talking with others about their feelings and concerns and reassure them these feelings are common
- ✓ Talk about the social-emotional well-being of your students with others – it takes a village to monitor how people are doing and help them work through tough times
- ✓ Make sure your friends and family gets the help they need – there are many agencies in town who can help. If you need help finding an agency, please talk to a guidance counselor at any of our schools
- ✓ Encourage others! – provide them with a sense of hope and belonging
- ✓ Identify sleep problems – if you believe a friend or family member is not getting an adequate amount of sleep, talk with them. They may need to look into talking with someone who can help them better manage the feelings they're experiencing at night
- ✓ Promote prosocial activities – spend time with other people and socialize
- ✓ Be patient – don't become discouraged. Recovery and re-engagement happens at different paces for everyone.
- ✓ Don't personalize their actions or behaviors – traumatic events can cause people to act uncharacteristically. It is their mind's way of trying to manage the situation.
 - Empathize and emphasize resiliency by helping identify what is causing them to act out

References:

The National Trauma Stress Network
National Association of School Psychologists
American Psychological Association

Community Resources Available:

- Center Associates 1-800-896-2055
- Ardent Community Wellness Center 641-352-3031
- Grace C Mae 641-753-1289
- YSS of Marshall County 641-752-2300

School Resources:

- Anson elementary – Ashley Chyma 641-754-1020
- Fisher elementary – Sue Cleveringa 641-754-1030
- Franklin elementary – Dani Minkel 641-754-1041
- Hoglan elementary – Eugene Ubben 641-754-1060
- Rogers elementary – Mark Church 641-754-1070
- Woodbury elementary – Heidi Williams 641-754-1080
- Lenihan Intermediate 641-754-1160
 - Karen Mussig and Elaine Johnson
- Miller Middle 641-754-1110
 - John Augustine and Rachel Meckley
- Marshalltown High School 641-754-1130
 - Lydia Arevalo, Valerie Corson, Meri Edel, Rebecca Hohmann