
Healing from the Tornado

— Parenting and Child Wellness —

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Effects of Trauma

❖ Loss of Power and Control

- One of the most common feelings after a traumatic event is that life is unpredictable and that you may not have control over bad things that happen
- For children, this may be the first time they are experiencing what feels like a loss of innocence
- COVID may also be compiling on this idea

❖ Shift in sense of Safety and Security

- Children crave a world and supports that are safe and secure
- Traumatic events challenge this idea, which can result in increased clinginess to loved ones

Children will manifest
their feelings in
behaviors!



Common Behavior Changes in Children

- ❖ Clinginess/Fears
 - Fear of leaving loved ones
 - Fear that something bad will happen when apart
 - General Fears
- ❖ Nightmares
 - Difficulty sleeping alone
 - Bad dreams (themes can be direct or indirect)
- ❖ Tearfulness
- ❖ Body Complaints (e.g. headache, belly ache, etc)



Common Behavior Changes in Children Cont'd

- ❖ Acting Out/Mood Changes
- ❖ Regressions
 - Stages that children previously moved through may be revisited (e.g. potty)
- ❖ Shifts in Play
- ❖ Academic Changes
 - Difficulty concentrating
 - Motivation (important to pay attention to in teens, as can be sign of depression)
- ❖ Distance from Others
 - Teens may pull away from relationships, people who do not share the experience

Factors Specific to the Tornado

Questions to Consider:

Where were you, in general?

Were you with your children?

Who was there?

Was anyone hurt?

What level of damage/loss was there?

Long-term Triggers

- ❖ Weather
- ❖ Seeing the Damage (e.g. trees gone, rooves patched, etc.)
- ❖ Relocation
 - Home
 - School
- ❖ Anniversary Dates/Time of Year



Protective Factors

- ❖ Emotional Supports
- ❖ Personality
 - Hopeful/Optimistic
 - Believe in one's ability to cope
- ❖ Adaptability
 - Reaching out for help
 - Reframing/Distracting
 - Religious beliefs



What Can You Do as a Parent?

- ❖ Be open to and normalize discussion (this may come and go)
- ❖ Be open in an age-appropriate and boundaried way about how you are feeling
- ❖ Show them how you are coping - Do it together, when possible!
- ❖ Reassure their sense of current safety
- ❖ Allow them to help to create a safety/emergency plan
- ❖ Transitional object
- ❖ Identify how your child needs to process (direct vs indirect)
- ❖ Create routine and consistency
- ❖ Limit exposure to discussions of stressful ramifications
- ❖ **VALIDATE!**

Holidays

Be aware that the holidays can be a trigger, especially if you are displaced, lost many belongings, or are in a different financial situation.

Identify traditions you can still engage in (e.g. favorite places to visit, food to cook, etc)

Engage children in any attempts at new traditions and if possible give them choices.



Age Appropriate Coping Strategies

Children 0-4

- ★ Pink Noise
- ★ Lavender Ointment/Essential Oils
- ★ Glitter Bottles
- ★ Snow Globes



Children 5-12

- ★ Glitter Bottles
- ★ Popper
- ★ Find Me Bottles
- ★ Rice Bins
- ★ Orbeez
- ★ Mandala/Coloring Sheets
- ★ Play Doh
- ★ Kinetic Sand

Age Appropriate Coping Strategies Cont'd

Children 13-17

- ★ Fidgets
- ★ Music
- ★ Journal
- ★ Puzzles
- ★ Putty
- ★ Punching Bag/Pillow
- ★ Noise Cancelling Headphones



Self-Care

- ❖ Our children learn by watching us. When we are upset, do we communicate our feelings in a healthy way and practice self compassion? Do we utilize healthy coping skills or maladaptive ones?
- ❖ One of the most powerful ways to heal is to have time to share experiences as a family, whether it is a scheduled activity or a meal together.
- ❖ When sharing emotions, name your safer emotions, openness is good but be aware of your audience and tone. Simple “I Statements” are ideal.
- ❖ I feel _____ when _____ because _____. I need _____.

Self-Care Cont'd

Boundaries help keep our needs intact. Your time has value!

- ❖ Boundary Types: Physical boundaries, Material boundaries, Time/Energy boundaries, Emotional and Mental boundaries.
- ❖ Knowing our boundaries and needs empowers us to self advocate. When we engage in those actions ourselves, our children can learn from them.
- ❖ What brings you joy? Prioritize a few moments a day for your joy, simple mindful moments work. If you can, schedule you-time, us-time, them-time.

Resources

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network - Vast resources for children and parents

- <https://www.nctsn.org/resources/trinka-and-sam-and-swirling-twirling-wind>
- https://www.nctsn.org/resources/all-nctsn-resources?search=tornado&resource_type=All&trauma_type=All&language=All&audience=All&other=All

American Counseling Association

- <https://www.counseling.org/knowledge-center/mental-health-resources/trauma-disaster>

GoNoodle- topic area “Flow and Steady” with free videos & printable activities

- <https://www.gonoodle.com/tags/PXodv2/flow-and-steady?tab=featured>

Activities for Children with Anxiety

- <https://copingskillsforkids.com/calming-anxiety>

Upper Dublin Mental Health First Aid Website: <https://udmhfa.weebly.com>

For a Mental Health Crisis call Montco Mobile Crisis at 855-634-4673 available 24/7