



LITTLE ROCK
SCHOOL DISTRICT

After the Tornado, How to Support Your Student

The intense anxiety and fear that often follow a tornado can be especially troubling for children, especially if children were victims of the disaster or were separated from their families.

For children, sudden disasters like a tornado can create intense anxiety and fear. This is particularly true if family members or friends were injured or died or if a child is separated from his or her family during the storm. A child's distress may manifest itself in a variety of ways, including experiencing nightmares or fear of going to sleep, unusual outbursts or tantrums, or withdrawing and becoming more solitary.

There are several things parents and guardians can do to help:

- Spend more time with children and let them be more dependent on you during the months following the trauma—for example, allowing your child to cling to you more often than usual. Physical affection is very comforting to children who have experienced trauma.
- Provide play experiences to help relieve tension. Younger children in particular may find it easier to share their ideas and feelings about the event through nonverbal activities such as drawing. While drawing ask them how they are feeling and if they have any worries. You can then help them alleviate those concerns.
- Be available and encourage older children to ask questions they may have, as well as sharing their thoughts and feelings with you and with one another. This helps reduce their confusion and anxiety related to the trauma. Respond to questions in terms they can comprehend. Reassure them repeatedly that you care about them and that you understand their fears and concerns.
- Keep regular schedules for activities such as eating, playing and going to bed to help restore a sense of security and normalcy, even if your family has been relocated to a shelter or other temporary housing.
- Provide safe opportunities for children to help others—helping others offers a sense of control and can help children feel better about themselves.
- Reduce the number of times children see the trauma on the news. Repeatedly watching broadcasts of the disaster can re-traumatize children and adults.
- Parents should seek professional help through school counselor when students have continual and aggressive emotional outbursts, serious problems at school, preoccupation with the traumatic event, continued and extreme withdrawal, and other signs of intense anxiety or emotional difficulties