

## Caring for Children During a Flood

Children need a lot of support during emergencies, so parents (and caregivers) must watch them closely to make sure they pick up on signs of fear or stress. It may be hard for children to completely understand the impact of a flood, but they will respond to the tension in their environments. It may also be hard for children to articulate their fears or feelings. Parents will want to make children feel as safe and protected as possible.

Children are generally resilient and most will readily bounce back from the impact of a flood, especially if they have caring adults who support them.

### **Give your child (children) extra attention during an emergency:**

- If you're at a loss for words when your child wants your attention, try giving a hug and saying, "This is really hard for us."
- Try to recognize the feelings underlying your child's actions and articulate them. It can help to say something like, "I can see you are feeling really sad about this."
- Some children may have an overwhelming fear they can't voice and need you to help them find the words. For example: If friends lose 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 casts, 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 to back you up.
- If you have to leave, even briefly, during the flood, you may need to reassure your child 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 your child feel secure.
- Read children's books about similar emergencies and use them to help your child discuss feelings and fears.

### **Provide extra support at bedtime during the flood:**

- 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 if you stay near until he/she falls asleep. When the emergency's over, gradually go back to the old routine, by saying that you will check back in two minutes and continue lengthening the time until your child feels secure again.
- Some children feel better if a night light is left on for them.
- Siblings may want to sleep in the same area until they feel more secure again.
- If you have been evacuated from your home, try to ensure that your child has her/his familiar comforts (ex: favourite stuffed animal, blanket, pillow).

### **Get back to normal as soon as possible after the flood:**

- 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.

It's normal for children to have residual feelings and reactions for some time after the emergency is ended, but some children may have extreme reactions that continue for several weeks. For example, your child may:

- keep re-experiencing flood events (ex: nightmares, flashbacks)
- avoid things connected with the flood
- withdraw from others and appear to be numb or shut down
- continually cry
- show extreme anxiety, jumpiness, sleep difficulties, irritability, poor concentration
- show little or no interest in usual activities

If these kinds of reactions continue, there are lots of resources for you and your child.

### **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, you can 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. Call 204-788-8200 in Winnipeg; toll free 1-888-315-9257; 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- Triple P Parent Line has numerous resources. Call 204-945-4777 in Winnipeg; 1-877-945-4777 toll free; 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. weekdays. After hours: leave a voice message and a contact number for a call back.
- Rural Manitobans can call the Manitoba Farm and Rural Support Services Line at 1-866-367-3276 toll free; 10:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. weekdays. Or, go to [www.ruralsupport.ca](http://www.ruralsupport.ca).
- Clinic Community Health Centre 24-hour Crisis Line can provide counselling and referrals for all Manitobans. Call 204-786-8686 in Winnipeg; toll free 1-888-322-3019; 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- If you or someone you know is thinking of suicide, the Manitoba Suicide Line is available to all Manitobans. Call 1-877-435-7170 toll free; 24 hours a day, seven days a week; or go to [www.reasonstolive.ca](http://www.reasonstolive.ca).