

Helpful Tips (5)

- **Routine** – maintain as normal of a schedule as possible
- **Plan** – discuss all scheduled events each day so that students can feel prepared
- **Choice** – try to give students choices whenever workable in order to facilitate feelings of empowerment
- **Monitor** – be alert to your own feelings so that they are not negatively affecting students
- **Self-Care** – allow yourself times to relax and discuss events with other adults
- **Behaviors** – be on the lookout for changing behaviors – they may be a short-lived reaction but seriously disrupting or risky behaviors must be addressed
- **Play** – allow reenactments/discussion of flood event if it will not harm any students
- **Facts** – be prepared to provide factual information about the flood as you deem appropriate

Glossary

Comorbid – the presence of more than one mental health diagnosis in a person

Associated Stimuli – any information in one's environment that is related to the traumatic experience

Hyperarousal – increased awareness of one's environment; may include difficulty concentrating

Pervasive – describes symptoms that are seen in multiple environments (i.e. home and school)

More Resources

American Red Cross

www.disasterhelp.gov/flood

This resource provides specific information about drinking water, mold, and other problems that follow a flood.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

www.fema.gov/hazard/flood/index.shtm

This site is comprehensive and includes tips on how to effectively prepare for and handle a flood situation.

National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP)

www.floodsmart.gov

This site discusses what areas are most prone to floods and insurance issues.

References

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How Educators can Support Children and Youth Following a Flood



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Case Study

The Johnson family experienced a flood last month. They had only minimal flooding in their basement, but the damage affected the family's daily life.

Jan, age 13, responded by avoiding situations in which the flood was likely to be discussed. She "spaced out" and doodled when teachers talked about the flood in class and became visibly distressed when forced to discuss the event.

Ben, age 5, expressed unrelenting fear of a flood occurring again. Ben had been attending kindergarten without difficulty, but refused to leave his mother after the disaster. He said that he was afraid "mommy might die."

Family activities were back to normal within three months of the flood. Jan's avoidance of flood-related topics dissipated after the middle school held a day-long workshop that allowed students to ask questions and learn coping skills. Ben's fears did not subside however, and he was referred to a child therapist by the school counselor.

What to Expect (7)

As the above example illustrates, children and youth who experience a flood are likely to have a wide variety of thoughts, feelings, and reactions to the event. Many of these reactions will depend on how much each student was directly impacted by the flood. Their responses must be considered through a developmental lens as well.

Educators must work to maintain a safe school environment in which symptoms may be monitored, assessed, and referred, if necessary.

Death Anxiety (4)

Adolescents (and some younger children) may become more aware of their own eventual death following a flood disaster. This awareness can cause feelings of vulnerability that are uncommon to an egocentric youth.

Feelings of vulnerability may lead to better decision-making but they can also cause extreme avoidance of feared situations, which can delay development. It is important that educators encourage teens to take "safe risks" socially and academically.



School Support (3)

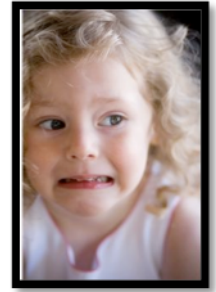
- Support should be provided as soon as possible following the flood event
- Programs should be multi-modal, allowing students to express themselves in various ways – for example, through singing and drawing
- Support should address everyone within the school environment: students, teachers, administrators, and other staff
- The school environment must be and feel physically and psychologically safe
- Incorporating newly presented educational material into classroom curricula helps to integrate the new knowledge
- Natural supports, such as family and friends, should be utilized

PTSD

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is often overlooked in children due to their inability to communicate feelings verbally and high instances of comorbid disorders (2).

Those who have been closest to or most affected by the flood are the most likely to develop PTSD. This means that the child whose home was lost due to water damage is more likely to suffer from PTSD than the child who only saw the flood on TV (6).

Symptoms of PTSD include intrusive thoughts, avoiding associated stimuli, and hyperarousal. PTSD diagnosis cannot be determined until the child has been experiencing symptoms for one month. However, children and youth can receive help with symptoms at any time (1).



Further Treatment

If pervasive, distressing symptoms persist and affect academic or social activities children and youth should be referred to a mental health professional for a psychological evaluation.

Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (TFCBT) and Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) are proven to be effective therapies for children who have experienced trauma (2).

Educators should provide information regarding the child's classroom functioning and symptoms to assist in obtaining an accurate assessment and successful treatment.