

# Pointers For Parents

## Helping Children Cope With Disasters

(NAPSA)—Seeing the devastation of Hurricane Katrina on the news every evening has left us all feeling helpless and anxious. The intensity of the disaster is inescapable for adults and children alike. As adults, we are able to manage our feelings and continue our lives despite any anxiety we may feel, but children may react differently.

“Children have little experience coping with tragic events and may have a more difficult time managing their feelings,” said Sharon Bergen, senior vice president of education and training for Knowledge Learning Corporation, the world’s leading early childhood care and education company. “They look to adults to understand how to react to challenging situations.”

Bergen offers the following advice to parents on how to help children cope with disasters.

Continue daily routines. Following a disruptive event—such as a natural disaster—children like to know things are returning to normal and are within their control. Children are comforted by the predictability of daily routines, so emphasize those things that remain the same.

Shelter children from unnecessary exposure. Repeated exposure to disaster-focused media coverage may cause children to relive the experience. Young children who have trouble understanding what is real may believe the event is happening again each time they see it on television. Limit conversations about the disaster when children are present.

Expect anxiety-related behav-



Photo Credit: Knowledge Learning Corp.

iors. Very young children may not have the verbal skills to talk about their fears or anxiety. Children under stress may be unusually physical, act out, be withdrawn or stop demonstrating skills they have previously mastered. Activities that allow children to positively show emotions, such as drawing, painting or modeling clay, all offer outlets for their feelings.

School-age children benefit from activities that allow them to feel they are helping. Develop ways in which children might participate, such as selling lemonade or cookies to raise money for relief agencies. Even small acts, such as making cards for children in affected areas, let children feel they are making things better.

Show children they are loved. Most of all, during challenging times, continue to show children the same love and concern you usually do. Although the news of the day may present a distraction, your time, attention and support are invaluable to your child.