

Natural Disasters

A summary of the scientific literature on natural disasters and how to help children cope.



How This Impacts Children's Development

Every year, 175 million children globally are expected to be affected by natural disasters, including floods, cyclones, droughts, heatwaves, severe storms, and earthquakes. Children are particularly vulnerable during

natural disasters and are subject to increased physical health problems, mental health symptoms, trouble learning and decreased school attendance.

[READ THE BRIEF: Understanding the Impacts of Natural Disasters on Children, 2020](#)

[READ THE BRIEF: Developing a National Plan to Help Children Cope with Disaster, 2007](#)

Talking Points from the SRCD Briefs

- Roughly 85% of billion-dollar disaster events from 1980-2019 were weather-related events affecting children's homes, schools, and communities.
- Recovery is more difficult for children who experience severe or prolonged disasters, are involved in direct exposure or extreme violence, or when additional adversities continue to occur.
- Children's responses to disaster vary by gender, age, and individual differences in coping skills.
- Resuming usual routines of school and play activities is associated with more positive adjustment for children.
- 98% of children participated in mental-health services when services were in schools.
- Children are more vulnerable if they grew up in poverty, or have experienced previous trauma, loss, or mental health difficulties.

Policy Considerations in the Briefs

- Target services to the most vulnerable children, such as children in foster care, those with developmental or medical disabilities, children with limited resources, and children who experience high levels of disaster exposure or related stressors.
- Ensure separation from parents or caregivers is minimized.
- Invest in school infrastructure and remediation efforts so that children can return to "normal" life as soon as possible.
- Increase the availability and accessibility of evidence-based mental health services.
- Consider that more resources and services are needed when disasters strike populations that are already living in poverty.
- Ensure that first responders are trained to act in a way that is focused on the effects of trauma and is appropriate for children of different ages.

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