

School Responses to Natural Disasters

(<http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/practicenotes/naturaldisasters.pdf>)

Hurricanes, fires, earthquakes, and other natural disasters close schools and endanger communities. When such crises occur, district and school crisis plans and crisis teams are indispensable. Many schools need resources and info to guide their responses. Relevant aids are accessible through our website at <http://smhp.psych.ucla.edu>. On the home page, see *Responding to a Crisis* (in the yellow circle). Click and you will find samples of materials and

guidelines, as well as links to other resources. Connect, for example, to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) link to – *Kids: Resources for Parents & Teachers*.

As a quick reminder in any emergency, the following are some general points frequently mentioned that may be of some help.

Responding to Crises: A Few General Principles

- (1) *Immediate Response – Focus on Restoring Equilibrium.* In responding , the following have been highlighted in most guidelines as essentials:
 - >>Be calm, direct, informative, authoritative, nurturing, and problem-solving oriented.
 - >>Counter denial, by encouraging students to deal with facts of the event; give accurate information and explanations of what happened and what to expect – never give unrealistic or false assurances.
 - >>Talk with students about their emotional reactions and encourage them to deal with such reactions as another facet of countering denial and other defenses that interfere with restoring equilibrium.
 - >>Convey a sense hope and positive expectation – that while crises change things, there are ways to deal with the impact.
- (2) *Move the Student from Being a Victim to Becoming an Actor.*
 - >>Plan with the student promising, realistic, and appropriate actions they will pursue when they leave you.
 - >> Build on coping strategies the student has displayed.
 - >> If feasible, involve the student in assisting with efforts to restore equilibrium.
- (3) *Connect the Student with Immediate Social Support (peer buddies, other staff, family) to provide immediate support, guidance, and other forms of immediate assistance.*
- (4) *Take Care of the Caretakers.*
 - >>Be certain that support systems are in place for staff in general
 - >>Be certain that support (debriefing) systems are in place for all crisis response personnel.
- (5) *Provide for Aftermath Interventions – be certain that individuals needing follow-up assistance receive it.*

Need more information? Contact our Center.