TIP SHEET

The Impact of Disaster on Vulnerable Children and Families

Sabrina Carrie Crawford, PsyD

Identify and Assess Reactions to the Disaster: ~Ways to Engage Families~

- Respond in a culturally informed manner
- Provide and enhance feelings of safety and comfort
- Gather essential information to provide appropriate resources
- Emphasize the importance of support – familial and social
- Promote positive coping and build upon resiliency

Techniques for working with Children

- Provide opportunities to process the experience
- Normalize their reactions
- Facilitate meaningful connections
- Provide structure and containment
- Build upon the child’s resiliency and strength

Helpful Resources:

- The “Ready” campaign (www.ready.gov) includes a family friendly tool to help parents and teachers educate children about emergencies, including natural disasters.

- A UNICEF-sponsored popular cartoon (http://www.unicef.org/meena/) that is widely viewed throughout South Asia features Meena, an 8-year-old girl living with her family in a small village. One story line designed in response to the Pakistan earthquake shows
Meena meeting Neela, who is sad because she was separated from her family during an earthquake but then is cared for by Meena’s family and eventually is reunited with her own family. The popularity of this cartoon is attributed to embedding an important educational message in a program that is 90% entertainment (Li, 2006).

- The World Association for Disaster and Emergency Medicine (http://wadem.medicine.wisc.edu/), which offers cutting-edge interdisciplinary knowledge about disaster management for psychologists, as well as physicians, nurses, paramedics, emergency managers, disaster planners, hospital administrators, and sociologists. Many of these websites also provide resources and information to other websites, some of which are available in different languages.

- It’s OK to Remember (Child Traumatic Grief Committee, 2005) and The Courage to Remember (Child Traumatic Grief Committee, 2005) are videos accompanied by training curriculum, aimed at both a general audience that includes parents and caregivers and a professional audience that includes mental health and other practitioners who work with children and families to provide services to traumatically bereaved children.

- Responding to Crisis in the Aftermath of Disasters Videos: Developed in collaboration with the National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, this product contains 16 educational video vignettes that demonstrate intervention strategies for children and adults after a terrorist event or disaster (Brymer & Watson, 2007). Each vignette includes background information, key teaching points, subtitles highlighting skills, and closed captions. The vignettes are consistent with the principles of psychological first aid and evidence-informed current disaster mental health intervention practices.

Informative References


