

Produced by



**Save the Children®**

in  
partnership  
with




**ZERO to THREE**  
Early connections last a lifetime



# Shelter From the Storm

A Guide for Early Care and Education Providers



**ZERO TO THREE** is a national, nonprofit organization established in 1977 that provides parents, professionals, and policymakers the knowledge and know-how to nurture early development. Our mission is to ensure that all babies and toddlers have a strong start in life.  
[www.zerotothree.org](http://www.zerotothree.org)

**Save the Children** invests in childhood—every day, in times of crisis and for our future. In the United States and around the world, we give children a healthy start, the opportunity to learn, and protection from harm. By transforming children’s lives now, we change the course of their future and ours.  
[www.savethechildren.org](http://www.savethechildren.org)

Cover photo © iStockphoto.com / digitalskillet / for illustrative purposes only

# Contents



Photo: © iStockphoto.com / Frank DeMeyer / for illustrative purposes only

<b>Welcome.....</b>	<b>2</b>
• Using This Guide.....	3
<b>Section One: Focus on You.....</b>	<b>4</b>
• Self-Care Techniques.....	5
<b>Section Two: Before a Disaster.....</b>	<b>6</b>
• Your Everyday Interactions Build a Secure, Trusting Relationship That Can Buffer Children From Stress.....	6
• What Babies and Toddlers May Experience and Ways You Might Respond: In a Child's Words.....	7
• Creating a Safety Routine.....	8
<b>Section Three: During a Disaster.....</b>	<b>10</b>
• What Babies and Toddlers May Experience and Ways You Might Respond: In a Child's Words.....	11
<b>Section Four: After a Disaster.....</b>	<b>12</b>
• What You May Feel and Experience.....	12
• Strategies to Help You and Other Adults Cope.....	13
• Seeking Help For Yourself.....	14
• When Families Need Additional Assistance.....	14
• What Babies and Toddlers May Experience and Ways You Might Respond: In a Child's Words.....	14
• What to Say?.....	16
• Signs a Child Is Saying, "I'm Having a Difficult Time." ...	17
<b>Closing Thoughts.....</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Acknowledgments.....</b>	<b>18</b>

# Welcome

## Using This Guide With Your Colleagues

Here are some suggestions for using this guide in conversations, whether during a team meeting, a staff meeting, or a professional development workshop:

- Share stories about a time someone has helped you feel secure in an everyday situation. Discuss what this person said or did to help you feel this way (e.g., be dependable, listen, hug you, give you words for your feelings). Then share stories of a time you helped a child feel secure. What did you say or do? How did the child respond?
- Discuss how what you say and do every day to build trusting, secure relationships can support a young child if and when disaster strikes.
- Discuss and chart what children might be experiencing. Chart ideas about how you might respond.
- Review your safety routine. Identify three strategies you can incorporate to help children feel more secure and emotionally safe.
- Discuss the link between self-care and caring for others. Come up with a self-care practice you can incorporate in your daily routine (e.g., bring in a flower to put on the counter, sip your favorite tea, share a story about something a child did that made you smile).
- Go through the items in your Go-Bag. Which ones offer emotional support? What might you add to help children feel more safe and comfortable in an emergency situation?

For additional training on emergency preparedness, please see Save the Children's "Get Ready. Get Safe." Website at [www.savethechildren.org/getready](http://www.savethechildren.org/getready)

**D**o you teach and care for babies, toddlers, and their families in a center-based program? Or in your home? Are you a professional development specialist who supports early care and education providers?

This guide was written for you by Save the Children, the nation's leading expert on children in the event of disaster, and ZERO TO THREE, a national organization dedicated to ensuring that all babies and toddlers have a strong start in life. The goal of this guide is to provide you information to help you meet the emotional needs of young children and their families before, during, and after a disaster.

It can be tempting to think, "Oh, they're too young to remember—they won't be affected by what's happening." Actually, even though young children may not understand what they see or hear, they are taking everything in and trying to make sense of what they are experiencing. Caregivers play a critical role in helping to shape how children perceive the world around them. In fact, young children are "amazingly tuned into the behaviors and emotions of the significant caregivers in their lives including parents, grandparents, relatives, teachers, and other adults" (Osofsky, 2007, p. 4).

Young children remember early relationships and experiences in their bodies and minds even before they have words to talk about what is happening. Early memories help shape children's views of themselves and others.

Research on parent-child attachment over the past 60 years supports the understanding that consistent, sensitive, and responsive caregiving early in life sets a pattern for young children's optimal expectations of people in the future (Dykas & Cassidy, 2011). Those experiences can serve as a buffer to protect children from scary, traumatic experiences, such as natural disasters, or leave them vulnerable, with fewer ways to cope.

Although you cannot prevent a child from being upset and frightened during a disaster, you can work to ensure she remembers that someone—you—were there to comfort and support her. It is you, your voice,

your smile, the silly song you sing together, your calm explanation of what is happening that will help a child—and family—to feel connected, confident, and competent in difficult times.

Supporting others during events when you feel frightened or overwhelmed is not easy. This is true, especially if and when memories and feelings from a previous disaster are stirred up. But with your own support system, coping strategies, and tools such as these, you can do it. This guide will help.

## Using This Guide

**W**e at Save the Children and ZERO TO THREE invite you to use this guide to inform conversations with colleagues and families about ways you can support a young child's emotional well-being before, during, and after a disaster.

We know you are busy. In response, we have designed this guide to make it easy for you to use whether in a staff meeting or a parent workshop. Charts and boxes will provide helpful information at a glance. Some of the content will affirm what you already know and do. Some will offer new information, insights, and strategies to strengthen your partnerships on behalf of babies and toddlers.

In each section, you will find charts in the voice of babies and toddlers. These charts convey possibilities of what children may be experiencing and ideas of ways you might respond. Because babies and toddlers don't communicate through words, you have to pay attention to their behavior and ask yourself, "What is a child's behavior telling me?" You can then use this information to help you decide how best to respond.

You will also find simple and realistic ways to take care of yourself. Self-care doesn't often come naturally for people who have chosen a career path of caring for others. But by taking care of yourself, you can be more present and effective in seeing and responding to others during times of calm, as well as during times of confusion.

We begin this conversation with you. Why? Because "how you are, is as important as what you do (Pawl & St. John, 1998, p. 3)."

## Talking With Families

Here are some tips for talking and partnering with families about ways you can work together to prepare and protect their children in the event of a disaster:

- **Provide some basic information about how to help babies and toddlers feel safe.** For example, talk about the importance of trusting relationships and routines. Ask parents how their children are most easily comforted, or discuss what you have noticed provides comfort for their children.
- **Review your program's Go-Bag items with families.** Point out those that have been included to support children's emotional well-being. Encourage families to provide ideas and items that will comfort their individual child. Encourage families to include "emotional support" items in their Go-Bags at home.
- **Discuss what children might be experiencing and how parents might respond supportively.**
- **Share how you provide safety-themed activities throughout the year to teach children about the people in the community who protect them and keep them safe (e.g., firefighters, police officers, doctors, emergency medical service technicians).** Invite families to join you for these lessons. Send artwork or flyers home with information about what you shared with the children.



# Section One:

## Focus on You



Photo: Kiwi Street Studios / for illustrative purposes only

**Y**oung children and their families depend on you. When you take care of yourself—professionally and personally—you are better able to respond to their needs. You are also better able to focus on what is happening in the moment and be aware of how your history with disasters and other unexpected difficulties shape your response.

They say *practice makes permanent*. This idea is not only true for running a quality program or conducting safety drills; it is true when it comes to taking care of you.

By practicing taking care of yourself in your everyday life, you will be better able to take a breath and think a little more clearly when the unexpected strikes.

In addition, by taking care of yourself you will be calmer, which, in turn, will help the children in your care feel more relaxed. You will also be modeling and introducing children to self-care skills that will serve them well throughout their lives.

*stretch*

*smile*

*breathe*

## Self-Care Techniques

Consider trying one, or more, of the self-care techniques described below.

**A. Commit to finding ways to focus on your self-care:**

- a. Find a co-worker to partner with you and remind each other to practice self-care.
- b. Write and post notes in different places to remind yourself to stretch, breathe, or smile.
- c. Write in a journal, or reach out to a comforting friend regularly.
- d. Create a daily routine so your mind and body know what to expect and when (e.g., eating, sleeping).

**B. Take 5 minutes at some point during the day to have quiet time** (e.g., no phone, music, chatting).

**C. Try a breathing exercise:**

- a. Inhale for 2 seconds and exhale for 4 seconds, then say to yourself an affirming statement (e.g., "I am capable.", or "I'll handle what I can handle.").
- b. Square breathing: Exhale, hold, inhale, and hold your breath again, to the count of 4 and then repeat the process (e.g., inhale, 2, 3, 4; hold, 2, 3, 4; exhale, 2, 3, 4; hold, 2, 3, 4).

**D. Do a check for muscle tension in your body**—do you feel it in your neck, back, stomach? Stretch your body at regular intervals throughout the day.

**E. Create a comforting, inspiring environment, both at home and at work.** Incorporate a family photo, plant, or favorite colors into your environment.

**F. At the end of the day, think of all you accomplished and give yourself a pat on the back.** You did all you could do today: great job! There will always be more to do, but you are done for today and it is enough. Tomorrow will be another day.

# Section Two:

## Before a Disaster



Photo: Kiwi Street Studios / for illustrative purposes only

It's natural to worry about how to keep children safe during a disaster. Or, you may worry that you will panic, or that children will be scared, or overwhelmed. These are normal concerns.

It can be comforting to keep in mind that many of the things you say and do every day with children are the same things children need from you when disaster strikes. This section will explore:

- How your everyday interactions build a secure, trusting relationship that can buffer children from stress
- What babies and toddlers may experience and how you might respond: In a child's words
- Creating a safety routine

### **Your Everyday Interactions Build a Secure, Trusting Relationship That Can Buffer Children From Stress**

The words you say and activities you do day-by-day help children feel connected to you, which in turn frees children to feel and be more assured. These are experiences that are positive for all children and ultimately support them in dealing with life's ups and downs—minor and major. In fact, research shows that infants and toddlers who have trusting relationships with sensitive, attuned adult caregivers are less likely to experience high stress reactions when frightened by an event (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007).



## What Babies and Toddlers May Experience and Ways You Might Respond: In a Child's Words

When I...	I may be saying...	How you can support me today and in case disaster strikes
Smile and give you a hug in the morning. Snuggle up with you to read a book.	I trust you. You are one of the important adults in my life.	Show me I can count on you:  Strengthen our relationship and the trust between us by being dependable, consistent, warm and caring, and responsive.
Make a tower of four blocks or eat using my spoon—and look up at you with a smile.	I can do it! Look at me! I'm proud. What can I try next?	Teach me that I can manage:  Create the opportunity for me to practice and "do it myself." For example, invite me to hold my bottle, stand at the sink on a footstool to wash my own hands, or help you set the table for snack.  Share my delight in my accomplishments. Such as, "Wow! Look how you found the right piece. You're working so hard to put this puzzle together."
Cry and hold onto you when I am sad because Mommy has to go to work. Or call you to help when my ball is stuck under the sofa.	I count on you to help me when I am upset or something happens.  Some days I need you more than others.	Show me I can count on you to help me be calm, handle my feelings, and solve problems:  Be calm. It helps me to know that everything will be OK.  Listen to my feelings.  Give me words to help me understand what is happening.  Help me problem-solve. "Let's use this ruler to reach your ball." You are teaching me I am competent and can manage.
Cry or look startled or unsure when we have a safety drill.	What is happening?	Stay calm and I will know everything is OK.  Tell me the story of what is happening: "The bell is ringing. That means we have to go outside (or in the basement, or to the shelter) to be safe. You can ride in your crib (or I'll carry you, or you can hold my hand)."

When I...	I may be saying...	How you can support me today and in case disaster strikes
Insist on being held, fuss, run around, or look withdrawn after a safety drill.	Is that loud sound going to happen again? Am I safe to settle back into our routine?	<p>Help me understand what is going on and what to expect:</p> <p>Tell me the story of the drill again: "The bell rang and we went outside to be safe. Now we can settle back into our room and play."</p>

Your preparation combined with techniques you use in everyday care such as using a soothing voice, routines, and your calm presence can be reassuring to you both. Your soothing presence will help model calm responses to new events.

### Creating a Safety Routine

Routines play an important role in creating environments that support emotional and physical safety. Remember: Routines need planning and practice! Please refer to the table below to help you in developing, writing, and practicing your plan so it becomes a routine. Add the special touches that you do in everyday care—sing a special song, smile, use a soft tone of voice. Practice your safety routine in a calm, joyful way now so when the real time comes you will know what to do and the children will find comfort in going through the motions that they are familiar with. One important note: In addition to the information below, please refer to your state’s licensing standards for emergency preparedness requirements.

I need to know...	I will plan...	I will consider...
When to begin safety routine/receiving information.	Who/how the message will be delivered.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loud noises can be upsetting to children.</li> <li>• Watching TV with extreme weather images can be scary to young children.</li> </ul>
Where to go	Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contacting fire/emergency personnel to help identify safest space.</li> <li>• If you are in a space in which a child’s sibling(s) are present, consider working with their teacher to try to bring them together for comfort.</li> </ul>

I need to know...	I will plan...	I will consider...
What to bring for comfort	Pre-pack a Go-Bag, including comforting items	Including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Soft blankets</li> <li>• Soft “light up” plush toys</li> <li>• Few books, puppets, or toys</li> <li>• List of soothing songs or rhymes</li> <li>• Lovey or Snuggly</li> <li>• Pacifier</li> </ul>
How to get there	Route	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Practicing route during calm times. Think of how you will get the children to the safest place.</li> <li>• Having a plan in mind will help you stay calm if an event occurs.</li> </ul>
Where my list of steps will be stored when I get the signal to begin my safety routine	Write out a concise list of the steps of your safety routine (see box Example Safety Card)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Posting safety card in easy-to-reach spot</li> <li>• Preparing a card so you can put it in your pocket and bring it with you</li> <li>• Always having updated child information with you on a clipboard, notecards, etc., to have with you. Have numbers in your cell phone, too.</li> </ul>
<b>Remember: PRACTICE MAKES PERMANENT!</b>		

### Example Safety Card

*Quick self-care* —

*Calmly  
prepare  
to shelter* — [

*Settle,  
assure, and  
comfort the  
children* — [

*Quick self-care* —

#### TO DO

- ✓ Take a deep breath.
- ✓ Gather children quickly and calmly, ready to move to safe space in stroller.
- ✓ Count children.
- ✓ Get “Go-Bag” and medications.
- ✓ Tell the children: “It is time to go to our safety place.”
- ✓ Move to safe space.
- ✓ Count children.
- ✓ Sing “Ants Go Marching” in soothing tone as you settle the children.
- ✓ Take out comfort items and distribute to children.
- ✓ Talk to children about where you are and that you will stay with them the whole time.
- ✓ Read books, sing songs, etc... until you receive the all clear.
- ✓ Answer children’s questions about what is happening and where is Mommy or Daddy using simple, honest words.
- ✓ Remember: You’ve got this! As long as you are calm and focused the children will be better able to take your cues and be calmer, too.

# Section Three:

## During a Disaster



Photo: ©iStockphoto.com / ProArtWork / for illustrative purposes only

**W**hen alarms are ringing, the electricity goes out, or the unexpected occurs, it is your emotions and relationships that can create a sense of calm and assurance.

This is where all the work you have put into building relationships and practicing safety and daily routines pays off.

Reading and discussing the chart on the next page with colleagues and families can help you and other caring adults know how best to support the children in your care during a disaster. As you make connections between children's behaviors and their feelings, you can be more responsive to their needs. Also, the information in this chart may help to reassure you that behaviors that might seem unusual in everyday life can be a common response from a child and are to be expected during an emergency.



## What Babies and Toddlers May Experience and Ways You Might Respond: In a Child's Words

Here are some of the behaviors you might see, examples of what children may be thinking and feeling, and ideas of how you might respond.

When I...	I may be saying...	How you can support me
Cry, cling, hit or kick, or get quiet and still.	I am worried or afraid. Something is going on.  I feel unsettled. Unsure. Confused. Overwhelmed.	Offer me simple, clear words for what is happening: "We are waiting for the strong winds to pass."  Smile. Offer me a hug. Reassure me: "I am with you and holding you close." Or, "We are here together and safe now."  Let's sing a song we always sing together. Or tell me a story.
Stare, look wide-eyed, cling, or suck my thumb.	I'm confused. Overwhelmed.	Tell me simply and honestly what is happening: "We are here in the closet. I know it is dark, but we are together and safe."  Give me my "lovey" or "snuggly" if we have it with us.  Give me a sense of control. Let me squeeze my stuffed toy that lights up.
Cry for my mommy or daddy.	I want my most important people.	Tell me simply and honestly about my parents: "Your mommy/daddy said you can stay here with me until the storm is over. Then they want to come pick you up and give you a big hug."  Show me a photo of my family if we have it with us. Give me my "lovey" or "snuggly."
Fuss	I may be hungry or tired or afraid.	Offer me something to eat or drink if you can. Or a space to sleep.  Try to help me feel a sense of routine. Explain: "Even though we are in a different place, it is snack time/naptime."

# Section Four:

## After a Disaster



Photo: ©iStockphoto.com / Jani Bryson / for illustrative purposes only

**L**ong after the winds and rains stop and the sun begins to shine, children—and adults—can and often do continue to experience repercussions from the event.

This section focuses on how you and the other adults in a child's life are affected by, cope with, and work together after a disaster to support the children in your care.

In this section, we consider what you may feel and experience:

- Strategies to help you and other adults cope
- When families need additional assistance
- What babies and toddlers may experience and ways you might respond: In a child's words

### What You May Feel and Experience

Any caregiver of children may have the following emotions and/or experiences following an event:

**Forgetfulness**  
**Fogginess, numbness**  
**Driven and focused**  
**Sadness, grief, loss**  
**Lack of motivation**  
**Preoccupation with the event, avoidance**  
**of talking about the event**  
**Irritability**  
**Anger**  
**Distractibility, trouble concentrating,**  
**focusing on small, doable tasks**  
**Worry, anxiety**  
**Sensitivity**  
**Nervousness**  
**"Jumpy"**  
**Racing thoughts**  
**Feelings of guilt**  
**Somatic symptoms such as headaches,**  
**stomachaches, difficulty sleeping or**  
**sleeping too much**

Below are some strategies to help you cope with difficult feelings and emotions you may be experiencing following a disaster.

Strategies to Help You and Other Adults Cope	
Self-talk or talking aloud	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Get outside of your emotions by narrating what you are doing or are going to do.</li> <li>• Encourage yourself and others! Say positive things to yourself: "I've got this!" or "I am capable of dealing with difficult circumstances."</li> </ul>
Get perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Remember that you are all human and this was a big event.</li> <li>• It is normal to have an emotional reaction.</li> <li>• It is important to take care of yourself.</li> <li>• If the negative feelings don't pass, or are affecting your functioning after some time has passed, it may be time to talk to a mental health professional.</li> </ul>
Take care of yourself	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Talk with friends, take a walk, think about something that made you smile today.</li> <li>• Get back to healthy eating, exercise, and adequate sleep as soon as you can.</li> <li>• Write in a journal about your feelings.</li> </ul>
Routines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing what to expect when you are coping with big emotions can help to keep you, other adults, and the children calm.</li> <li>• You may need to set new daily routines based on your location.</li> <li>• Write down your new routine and post it on the wall, or keep it in your pocket</li> <li>• Respect others' routines around you.</li> </ul>
Keep an organized environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing where to find items and having an orderly environment can make you and others feel calmer.</li> <li>• If you are in new surroundings, decide where things will go and label those spots.</li> <li>• Share new locations with co-workers and parents.</li> <li>• Pick up and organize your space throughout the day.</li> </ul>
Minimize loud noises and sudden movements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After an event, loud noises and sudden movements can make people feel unsettled.</li> <li>• Find quiet where you can.</li> <li>• Speak in calm tones.</li> <li>• Minimize use of the public announcement system.</li> <li>• Move slowly and deliberately.</li> </ul>
Stay in the present moment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is easy to feel overwhelmed by your feelings after an event.</li> <li>• Watch out for negative thinking.</li> </ul>
Respectful communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoid judgments.</li> <li>• Stick to observations and facts.</li> </ul>

### Seeking Help for Yourself

Sometimes no matter how good your coping skills are, or how hard you try, you may need more support. If your feelings are getting in the way of your work and family life, it may be time to reach out for professional support.

### When Families Need Additional Assistance

Sometimes, no matter how supportive you are, a parent may need extra help. You can provide this support when you:

- Share resources with parents in a gentle, supportive manner.
- Know trusted resources in your area, or a hotline for area resources to provide to parents.
- Collect printed resources and make them easily available for families who may not be comfortable asking for support.
- Host a community resource fair; this is often a way for families to access resources without directly asking for help.
- Refer families to the next level of care when needed.

### What Babies and Toddlers May Experience and Ways You Might Respond: In a Child's Words

When I...	I may be saying...	How you can support me
Cry, fuss, cling, withdraw, or get quiet and still	Things still feel strange to me.	Cuddle and hug me. I need extra loving to help me feel safe and secure when things are so uncertain.  Offer me safe ways to express feelings, such as drawing, pretend play, or telling stories.
Stay still. Show no interest in playing or talking with you or anyone.	I'm still worried.	Come sit with me.  Invite me to play, read a book, or take a walk.
Cling, scream, and cry when you leave me—even to go into another room.	I'm still scared. I feel better when you are with me.	Tell me when you are going into another room and talk about what you are doing out loud so I know you are still close by.  Tell me who will take care of me if you have to go and reassure me you will be back.



When I...	I may be saying...	How you can support me
Want everything to be done "my way."	I want and need a sense of control. Things have been crazy around here lately.	Be patient and calm as you can. I need your help to regain a sense of control and feel safe.  Find appropriate ways to empower choices so that I can be in control of some things. For example, "Would you like to color with the red or the blue marker?"
Talk about our old center or friends who have moved away.	I miss my friends and familiar places. I miss how life used to be.	Listen. Acknowledge that things have changed.  Tell stories, draw pictures, or look at photos to help me remember places and people.  Help me write a letter to my old friends or child care program.
Am more aggressive—I may hit, kick, or bite you or other people.	I am so upset! Everything is different.	Comfort me.  Offer me limits in positive ways so I know that I can count on you to help me handle my intense feelings. Explain: "Even though you are upset, I will help you so you don't hurt another person or yourself." Keeping me from being hurtful will help me feel good about myself again.
Don't want to eat. Or have trouble sleeping.	I don't feel totally safe.	Reassure me.  Create a comforting sleep routine—reading, singing a song or two, giving me my blanket or "lovey." I may need to be near you for a bit. It won't be forever. You can help me to feel safe enough to sleep on my own again.
Act out scary events in my play.	I am trying to understand and gain a sense of control about what has happened.	Let me play. Join in. Narrate what I am playing so I know you understand what I am telling you and so I can gain some words of my own to talk about what happened.  Let me use play dough or other art materials to express my emotions.

When I...	I may be saying...	How you can support me
Return to earlier behaviors, such as thumb sucking and wetting my pants.	I want to be cared for. It's hard for me to hold it all together right now.	Be understanding and patient.  Reassure me we are OK.  Honor self-soothing in the immediate aftermath. Don't get angry at me for these behaviors. They will stop when I feel safe again.
Am happy, singing, playing.	I feel happy right now.	Play with me. Let's have a good time—even though things are different.
Gaze in your eyes, smile, reach for you, give you a hug, run into your arms.	I love you. I'm so glad you are here for me.	Laughing and being silly together is fun—and can help us both feel calm. Let's enjoy being together.

### What to Say?

Talking about an event can be a challenge for adults. How can a life-changing catastrophe fit into words? And if you can find the words, thinking and saying them can bring back disturbing feelings and memories. Yet babies and toddlers need to hear the story of what happened to make sense of it and to feel connected to you.

Do your best to talk about what is going on using clear, simple, and honest language. Here are some examples to get you started:

- The wind was blowing and made a big noise. We went into the basement in the child care center to be safe, and now we are here at the shelter.
- The firemen came to our center after the big wind and asked us to move away from the glass to be safe. We are here now, and will wait together until your mom/dad/grandma comes to get you.
- We heard the sirens and we went to our safe place. Then we turned on the flashlights and had a snack. Now we are going to the shelter, and your mom/dad/grandma will come get you.

## Signs a Child Is Saying, “I’m Having a Difficult Time.”

Although all of these behaviors are common responses to a frightening event, when they persist over time and interfere with a child’s daily life, it can be a sign that the child and family need extra support. These behaviors during difficult times can put additional stress on already burdened parents, which can be the start of a negative cycle. Or, it can be an opportunity for you to support families as they tap into their resilience.

**The list below identifies behaviors that families (and you) might see and what family members might say to you:**

- Increased clinging, crying, and whining: “He’s really getting on my nerves.” “She sticks to me like glue.”
- Greater fear of separation from parent at home or other primary caregiver: “She doesn’t let me out of her sight.” “I feel like I can’t have a minute on my own.”
- Increase in aggressive behavior: “She’s being bad.” “The teacher told me she hit and kicked other children today in child care.”
- Withdrawing: “He’s never been this good before.” “She’s so quiet these days.”
- Harder to show interest in activities and other people: “He doesn’t seem interested in anything.” “She just sits there.”
- Changes in sleeping and eating patterns: “She falls asleep when we are out.” “He used to love scrambled eggs. Now he just pushes them aside.”
- More easily frustrated and harder to comfort: “Nothing I do makes her happy.” “She whines all the time.”
- Return to earlier behaviors, such as waking up at night, toileting accidents, and thumb sucking: “He’s acting like such a baby.”
- Replaying scenes experienced or heard about. “He’s been pretending to be in a dark closet turning his flashlight off and on and calling, ‘help!’”

Adapted from *Honoring Our Babies & Toddlers: Supporting Young Children Affected by a Military Parent’s Deployment, Injury, or Death* with permission from ZERO TO THREE

### Closing Thoughts

The trusting relationships you build during everyday moments help young children feel safe and secure as they grow and learn. Pause a moment and think about the babies and toddlers you care for and teach each day. How are they growing and learning? What are some of the things they do or say that make you smile and feel proud, such as roll over for the first time, reach for a rattle, taste a new food, catch your eye for a game of peek-a-boo, put on a dress-up hat, or wave to say, “bye-bye”? You have helped them to reach these important milestones.

You always have their physical safety in mind. What are some of the ways that you have kept children safe in the last week? For example, think about decisions you have made about the physical environment, classroom rules, and staying nearby so that you can offer a helping hand when needed.

Every day you keep children safe and protect them from harm—emotional and physical—through the decisions you make, by knowing what to do, and reacting in a calm manner. Your everyday interactions, together with planning and preparation, will help you keep children safe today—and in the case of a disaster.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ZERO TO THREE and Save the Children wish to express their deepest gratitude to everyone who has shared their thoughts, ideas, and additional contributions to the development of this publication.

Elizabeth Billingsley RN, BSN  
Public Health Nurse, Dispensing Coordinator  
Oklahoma City County Health Department  
Oklahoma City, OK

Susan Bradley, MS  
Consultant and Technical Support Specialist  
Child Care Services  
Oklahoma Department of Human Services

Amy Chlouber, LPC  
Endorsed Infant Mental Health Mentor-Clinical  
Infant and Early Childhood Services Manager  
ODMHSAS  
Oklahoma City, OK

Amy Dickson, PsyD  
Assistant Professor  
LSU Health Sciences Center  
Department of Psychiatry  
New Orleans, LA

Kathleen Fry-Miller, MEd  
Associate Director  
Children's Disaster Services  
New Windsor, MD

Brian Jensen  
Regional Director  
Services to Armed Forces/International Services  
Serving Oklahoma and Arkansas  
American Red Cross

Myrna J. Jones, MS, MDiv, DMin  
Volunteer and Trainer  
Children's Disaster Services  
New Windsor, MD

Georgeann Nigh Duty, MS, LPC, LADC  
Director, Child and Family Outpatient Services  
NorthCare, Oklahoma City, OK

James Tittle  
Regional Disaster Officer  
American Red Cross  
Oklahoma City, OK

Linda Whaley, MEd, MAOM, MEd  
Program Manager II  
Department of Human Services  
Child Care Services  
State of Oklahoma

Debra Williams, RN, MSN, CS  
Southwest and Rocky Mountain Division Nurse Leader  
Southwest and Rocky Mountain Division Staff  
Wellness Consultant  
American Red Cross  
OK/AR Regional Chapter  
Oklahoma City, OK

## WRITERS:

Aidan H. Bohlander, LICSW  
Amy Laura Dombro, MS

## ADDITIONAL EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS TRAININGS

Child Care Aware—Crisis and Disaster Resources  
[www.naccrra.org/programs-services/crisis-and-disaster-resources](http://www.naccrra.org/programs-services/crisis-and-disaster-resources)

FEMA Disaster Preparedness Trainings <http://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=is-366>

## REFERENCES

Dykas, M. J., & Cassidy, J. (2011). Attachment and the processing of social information across the life span: Theory and evidence. *Psychological Bulletin*, 137(1), 19–46.

National Scientific Council on the Developing Child. (2007). *The science of early childhood development*. Retrieved from [http://developingchild.harvard.edu/index.php/download\\_file/-/view/67/](http://developingchild.harvard.edu/index.php/download_file/-/view/67/)

Osofsky, J.D. (2007). Ask the expert. *Zero to Three*, 27(6), 4.

Pawl, J. H., & St John, M. (1998). *How you are is as important as what you do*. Washington, DC: ZERO TO THREE.

These materials are intended for education and training to help promote a high standard of care by professionals. Use of these materials is voluntary and their use does not confer any professional credentials or qualification to take any registration, certification, board or licensure examination, and neither confers nor infers competency to perform any related professional functions.

The user of these materials is solely responsible for compliance with all local, state or federal rules, regulations or licensing requirements. Despite efforts to ensure that these materials are consistent with acceptable practices, they are not intended to be used as a compliance guide and are not intended to supplant or to be used as a substitute for or in contravention of any applicable local, state or federal rules, regulations or licensing requirements. ZERO TO THREE and Save the Children expressly disclaim any liability arising from use of these materials in contravention of such rules, regulations or licensing requirements.

Copyright © 2015 ZERO TO THREE and Save the Children. All rights reserved. For permission requests, visit [www.zerotothree.org/permissions](http://www.zerotothree.org/permissions)

ISBN: 978-1-938558-27-6

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America