

# A Guideline for Disaster and Recovery

## What is disaster?

Disaster is a situation that is dangerous for a group of people and can cause great damage to buildings and communities. Disasters can be natural or man-made. Natural disasters occur all over the world. Disasters can be scary for children and adults, which can be worse if no preventative actions are taken or a community is not prepared.

### Examples of Disasters

#### Natural:

- Hurricanes
- Floods
- Earthquakes
- Landslides

#### Man-made:

- Mass transportation accidents
- Wars and civil unrest



## Preparing for disaster

Disasters may not be just a storm or accident. They are often followed by many smaller events, like having to leave the area or rebuild damaged homes after a storm. Being prepared for a disaster will:

- Save lives and reduce injuries
- Prevent or reduce damage to buildings
- Reduce economic losses
- Keep people from having to move because of damage
- Lessen stress
- Maintain function of important places like hospitals
- Protect the community



## How to prepare

- Understand which disasters might happen, like landslides from mountains or hills that are close by, rivers that might flood, or hurricanes
- Develop community and family based plans for safety for each type of disaster, such as where to go in the case of an evacuation, and how to find each other if separated (for a list of evacuation sites: (501) 8-222054)
- Educate children and adults about disasters and what to do when disaster strikes

## In the event of a disaster

During a disaster, some things are stressful. These can last for a long time after the disaster. They can be less stressful if communities are prepared. Changes in behavior in the weeks following a disaster are normal. These changes mostly pass with time, and last for different lengths of time for each person. Remember, everyone responds to disaster in their own way.

### Stressful events for children and teenagers:

- Loss of home and personal belongings
- Changing schools
- Loss of friends and pets
- Changes in playtime activities
- Family and community losses
- Moving because of disasters

### Stressful events for adults:

- Loss of home and personal belongings
- Upset children and loved ones
- Unable to communicate or locate family members
- Family and community losses
- Moving because of disasters



## How do people respond to disaster?



### Short-term reactions:

- Feeling lost, sad or confused
  - Shock, not believing what happened
- Followed by
- Feeling very sad or upset, crying
- Finally
- Accepting what happened

### Possible Long-term problems:

- Sadness
- Trouble sleeping
- Depression
- Anxiety
- Problems at home or school
- Physical health problems

It is important to understand that some people may need help during the recovery process. Different kinds of action are needed at each stage of disaster.

## Stages of Disaster

### *Warning before the Disaster*

#### Stressors

- Preparing for evacuation
- Transportation problems
- Communication problems
- Unsteady social support
- Unsteady community support

#### Effects

##### Mental health:

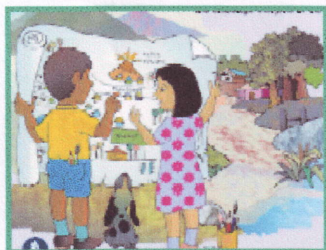
- Worry and anxiety
- Feeling depressed and sad

#### Factors that Impact People

- Problems coping with events
- Social support
- Little help available
- Problems from before the disaster (anxiety, depression, illness)

### What to do

- Be prepared: have first aid kits ready (bandages, plastic gloves, flashlights, radio), keep track of children
- Know the different types of disasters and what to do for each one
- Create response and evacuation plans with families and neighbors (decide what shelters you might go to and how you will get there)



### *During and Immediately After The Disaster*

#### Stressors

- Storm or event
- Shelters
- Problems from the event
- Getting medications

#### Effects

- Feeling lost or confused
- Shock
- Not believing what happened
- Sadness
- Learning to accept what has happened
- Trouble sleeping
- Bad dreams

#### Factors that Impact People

- How severe the event was
- How close people are to the event
- Neighborhood loss or damage
- Changes in normal life and routines
- Environment after the event
- Uncomfortable shelter environments
- Social support (friends and family)



## What to Do

### *Follow preparation and evacuation plans*

- Basic needs and safety come first:
  - Help take care of any injuries, like cuts or bruises
  - Some adults and children may need help remembering to eat and drink water
  - Care for children with special attention to their needs, which may be different from adults (such as providing activities or extra comfort).
- Keep families and village members together for support.
- Make sure those around you are safe until the event is over.



### *Organize groups for children and adults*

- Children may react differently than adults during a disaster. Playing together, playing games and drawing pictures can help. A return to normal daily routine or engaging in routine activities is also important.
- It often helps children to talk to people who they know and trust such as parents, teachers, and people from their church or others in the community.
- Organizing groups to talk about what happened can help some people, but it may not help everyone. It is important to remember that not everyone deals with disasters in the same way. Some people need less help than others to recover, and this is normal.

## **Recovery After the Disaster**

### Stressors

- Shelter conditions
- How well people are sleeping
- Problems getting supplies, food and clean water
- Amount of damage
- Housing
- Rebuilding efforts

### Effects

- Mental health problems (feeling worried, anxious or sad)
- Physical health problems (pains, stomach aches, headaches)
- Problems returning to normal routines

### Factors that Impact People

- Rebuilding the community
- Seeing loved ones suffer
- Loss of support from friends or family
- Possible long term problems down the road

## What to Do

- Most people recover from disaster and return to their daily lives before long.
- Some people like to be involved in the recovery process. This often helps people feel better and children can participate as well. They can:
  - Help gather food and supplies
  - Help repair damaged buildings and homes
  - Help rebuild the community or village
  - Help others
- Interventions for children they can be done at schools or by people that children already know.
- Remind adults and children that it is normal to feel sad or anxious from time to time.
- Some people can feel worried, anxious or sad for a long time after the disaster is over (more than one month). If these problems start to affect daily activities like doing chores, working, cleaning, and taking care of children, talking with a psychiatric health practitioner can help them feel better.
- Successful recovery during the stages of disaster can prevent problems later in life.

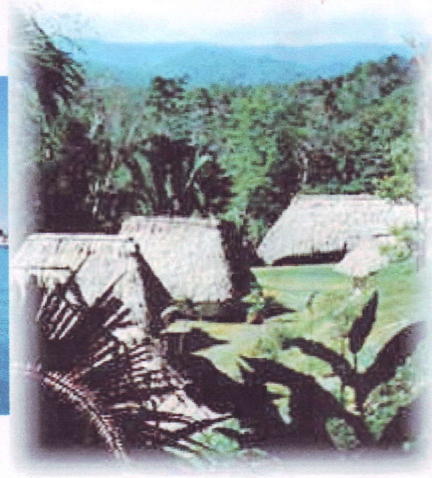


## Considerations for Different Cultures

There are many cultures in Belize: Creole, Garifuna, Mestizo, Spanish, Maya, English, Mennonite, Lebanese, Chinese, and East Indian. Many may have their own languages, music, and food. Some go to different churches, community centers and schools. Many cultures have different religions. Religious beliefs can help adults and children feel better after a disaster. People have different ways of dealing with events. Some things that work for some might not work for others. It is important to remember that everyone is different. Everyone deals with disaster in their own way.

People of every culture need to be ready for disasters. It can help to put people in charge of deciding what they will need before and after the disaster. People are unique and creative. They can make good plans for disaster. These plans and ideas can help people bounce back after a disaster. Children are also very creative. They can help when preparing for disaster. Children have their own strengths and they are important. They can use those strengths to help them adapt and recover.

Being prepared is our greatest defense. A little planning and preparation can save many lives and protect whole villages when a disaster happens.



## Resources

Belmopan Western Regional Hospital (501) 661-0862

Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency (246) 425-0386

<http://www.cdera.org>

Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (501) 822-1094

<http://www.caribbeanclimate.org>

Belize National Emergency Management Organization (501) 8-222054

<http://www.nemo.org.bz/preparedness.php>

Caribbean Risk Management Initiative

<http://www.onu.org/cu/crmi/index.html>

International Strategy for Disaster Reduction

<http://www.eird.org/>

Riskland Game and Workbook for children

[http://www.unisdr.org/eng/public\\_aware/world\\_camp/2004/pa-camp04-riskland-eng.htm](http://www.unisdr.org/eng/public_aware/world_camp/2004/pa-camp04-riskland-eng.htm)

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