



SAFETY

“Everyone has a need to feel safe that is deeply rooted in the brain for survival. We have to experience a felt sense of safety.” -Lindsey Murphy, PhD, CCLS

We all crave a sense of safety. Children and teens are especially vulnerable to the upheaval of routines and predictability that provide control and security. Especially during times of disaster, children need to feel safe. The following are a few developmental needs of children that support a sense of safety.



Infants and Toddlers: 0-2 years

- **Create routines:** Consistent meal times, nap times and bed routines are helpful. Routines create security and build trust and attachment during infancy. Maintaining these routines will help your baby to feel safe and supported.
- **Demonstrate predictability:** Games of peek a boo support safety by repetitively establishing the return of something after it disappears. This helps with separation anxiety when parents must return to work and can be especially important in the midst of additional stressors such as disasters.
- **Consistent and responsive caregivers:** Holding rocking and singing to your baby relieves stress and supports a sense of safety and security. Take the time to replenish yourself so you can be there physically and emotionally when your baby needs comfort.



Early Childhood: 3-6 years

- **Maintain Routines and create new ones:** Preschoolers thrive when they know what to expect. This offers them a sense of safety by knowing what happens when. Involve your preschooler in the creation of the routines by providing choices when possible.
- **Limiting Media Exposure:** Young children struggle to differentiate what is currently happening and what is a repeated image on TV. Today’s news commentators also tend to use strong language and loud tones. These can feel overwhelming and frightening to children. Turning the television off promotes a safe space, quiet time to think, and an opportunity to connect together.
- **Snuggle Time:** Preschoolers may regress to earlier stages of development or cling to you or a security item. Build into the routine snuggle times, read a book, play, or engage in nature, art or music together. Even if only for a few minutes, these snuggle breaks will increase your child’s sense of safety.



Middle Childhood: 7-12 years

- **Provide Facts:** Discuss with your children what they are hearing and seeing on news or social media sources. Children of this age group need their parents to help them understand and interpret what they are hearing and seeing. Providing explanations that help them understand the events, changes, and new routines will increase a sense of safety by providing an accurate understanding of the information.
- **Manage amount of information:** Changes can happen fast during a disaster. When possible help your children by grouping information into manageable amounts. This will allow them the space to decide what they can control and work to develop tools or strategies for what circumstances they cannot control.
- **Hugs not Shrugs:** As children get closer to adolescence, (think tweens) they may not want to be hugged as much. However, often during times of stress, children need both physical and emotional expressions of a parent's presence. Text messages, email, and sticky notes can be simple ways to let your child know you are there to promote security.



Adolescence: 13+ years

- **Reframing:** The way we talk about disasters can have an impact on how teens feel and experience safety. You might change words from “stuck at home” to “safe at home” during quarantine and reframe evacuating during a natural disaster to moving to a safe space. Less threatening or scary images, yet still accurate, promotes a sense of safety and protection.
- **Differentiate between Known and Unknown:** Helping your teen to make distinctions about what is known and what is unknown helps them to foster a sense of control. Most teens greatest source of information comes from other teens. Each time the information is told it has the possibility of being distorted, altered or changed in some way. Provide your teen with accurate sources of information such as school or community home pages, newsletters, and updates. Initiate discussion with them to clarify information.
- **Provide Reassurance:** Teens may feel unsafe regarding their futures. Celebrations of big life milestones may have been changed or canceled. Reassure your child that whatever they are feeling is normal and okay. Let them know that even when you do not have answers for them, you recognize their frustration and sadness.