The Earthquake in Haiti: Talking with Your Child about Natural Disasters

By now your child has had many opportunities to hear and/or learn about the recent earthquake tragedy in Haiti. The stories your child hears may prompt worry and questions. Are you prepared to handle these concerns and questions? Here are some tips on how you can help your children understand current events and the emotions that they may feel in response:

Answer children's questions: Children are most afraid when they do not understand what is happening around them. Make sure that when you are answering your child's questions, you are calm and respond in simple terms, at their developmental level. Too much or too many details may only cause young children to be more afraid or concerned. Your school-age child can be given a more detailed response. You may explain, for example, what happens during an earthquake or look together at an online or paper encyclopedia that helps illustrate.

Avoid too much media coverage: The disaster in Haiti has been covered extensively in the media. Remember, media images can be very graphic. For a young child, an image of a toppled home may be “graphic” enough to create feelings of fear. If your child is watching television, she may be exposed to a great deal of video and commentary that provides information for grown-ups but not the explanations or reassurances she may need. For example, depending on the age of your child, she may assume that what she is seeing on the television is occurring close to your home. This may cause the fear that a disaster will hit in your neighborhood. Remind her that she is safe and, if you think she will understand, show her on a map or globe, pointing out where you live and where Haiti is.

Maintain your daily routines: Routines are very important to children. Keeping a regular schedule, especially when the world seems unpredictable, gives your child a sense of reassurance. Hold him - physical comfort lets him know he is safe. Also, make sure your child gets appropriate sleep, exercise and nutrition.

Get children involved in the effort: If your child feels like she wants to help those in need, let her. Find a local or national organization or charity that is working to help those affected by the tragedy. This will show your child how people around the world are working together to help those in need. Ask your child what she would like to do. There are many things your child can do to be part of the relief efforts.

For more information:
- Child Care Aware's Preparing for Disaster: The Parent View
  [http://highqualitychildcare.org/ct/41gKiGF1rU2Z/](http://highqualitychildcare.org/ct/41gKiGF1rU2Z/)
- NACCRRA's Helping Families Cope with Traumatic Events
  [http://highqualitychildcare.org/ct/r7gKiGF1rUwz/](http://highqualitychildcare.org/ct/r7gKiGF1rUwz/)

Parent Central Express is the monthly e-newsletter of Parent Central, a program dedicated to helping parents access information on children's issues and resources on parenting. Parent Central is a program of the National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies (NACCRRA).