



Supporting Behavioral Health Needs following an Earthquake

An earthquake is a sudden and rapid shaking of the ground caused by the shifting of rocks deep underneath the earth's surface. Earthquakes can cause fires, tsunamis, landslides, or avalanches. While they can happen anywhere, areas at higher risk for earthquakes include California, Oregon, Washington, Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, and the Mississippi Valley.

If an earthquake happens, immediately take the following steps to protect yourself and your family:

- If you are in a vehicle, pull over and stop. Set your parking brake.
- If you are in bed, turn face down and cover your head and neck with a pillow.
- If you are outdoors, stay outdoors away from buildings.
- Do not get in a doorway.
- Do not run outside.

Behavioral Health Impacts of Earthquakes

Following an earthquake, it is common for individuals and families in and around the affected areas to experience distress and anxiety about their personal safety as well as the safety of their family, friends, and neighbors. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), it's common for people to experience emotional distress after an earthquake. People may experience:

- Physical symptoms such as headache, stomach pain, sleeplessness, or difficulty breathing
- Difficulty communicating or listening
- Difficulty making decisions or following directions
- Emotional symptoms such as fear, irritability, anxiety, grief, depression

Other signs of emotional distress related to earthquakes include:

- Being easily startled
- Having thoughts and memories related to the earthquake that you can't get out of your head

It is common for people to show signs of stress after exposure to a disaster making it important to monitor the physical and emotional health of those affected as well as those responding to the needs of others. Individuals and families who are having difficulty coping should be encouraged to seek care from a trained, trauma-informed provider.

Supporting Behavioral Health Needs of Children and Youth following an Earthquake

Earthquakes can leave children and teens feeling frightened, confused, and insecure. Their responses can be quite varied. According to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network, children who have experienced previous trauma, including other natural disasters, may be especially affected by additional disasters.

It is important to recognize that these reactions are normal and help children with their emotions.

How Do I Talk to My Child about Earthquakes?

- Listen. Encourage your child to express any feelings of fear, anxiety, or anger.
- Be honest. Speak in a calm tone of voice. Use reassuring words.
- Let them know that parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, teachers, and other adults in your child's life are working together to keep them safe.
- Answer questions based on the facts. Use explanations that are age-appropriate.

Resources

[Earthquake Preparedness: What Every Child Care Provider Needs to Know](#). Provides an introduction to earthquake safety for child care providers based in their homes and those based in larger facilities.

[Administracion de Servicios de Salud y Contra la Adiccion \(ASSMCA\)](#). Resource guides for disaster survivors, including tips on de-escalation and mental health awareness training.

[LineaPAS](#) ASSMCA crisis hotline. Survivors can contact la [#LineaPAS](#) at 1-800-981-0023 for support 24/7, 365 days a year.

[Save the Children - 10 Tips for Helping Children Cope with Disaster](#). After a disaster, parents, teachers and caregivers look for advice on how to help children cope with the after-effects. These 10 tips from Save the Children's emergency response experts can ensure that children get the support they need – well after the disaster is over.

[Ready.Gov - Helping Children Cope](#). Provides useful tips to parents and responders in helping children cope with the emotional aspects of a disaster after it happens.

[SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline \(en Español\)](#). Provides 24/7, 365-day-a-year crisis counseling and support to people experiencing emotional distress related to natural or human-caused disasters.

[Tips for Talking with and Helping Children and Youth Cope after a Disaster or Traumatic Event. A Guide for Parents, Caregivers, and Teachers](#). Tips developed by SAMHSA to assist adults support children from early childhood to adolescence cope with the behavioral health impacts of a disaster.

[National Child Traumatic Stress Network - Psychological First Aid Online](#). A 6-hour course that puts the participant in a post-disaster scene. For providers and first responders new to disaster response who want to learn the core goals of Psychological First Aid after a disaster.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' (HHS) Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Office of Human Services Emergency Preparedness and Response (OHSEPR) ensures the effectiveness of human services in preparedness, response, and recovery from disasters and public health emergencies. For additional information visit us [online](#) or contact us at ohsepr@acf.hhs.gov.