

Supporting Children's Emotions During Storms

For many children in Western North Carolina, storms are not just weather events. After Hurricane Helene, heavy rain, wind, snow, or power outages may trigger fear, anxiety, or memories of past danger. These reactions are normal, and with the right support, children can feel safe again.

1. Understand Trauma Responses in Kids

Children may show stress in different ways, including:

- Increased clinginess or separation anxiety
- Trouble sleeping or nightmares
- Big emotions (anger, crying, withdrawal)
- Regression (bedwetting, thumb-sucking, baby talk)
- Physical complaints (stomachaches, headaches)

These are stress responses, not misbehavior.

2. Create a Sense of Safety

- Stay calm and steady – kids take emotional cues from adults
- Use a reassuring voice and simple language
- Keep children physically close if they want (hugs, sitting together)
- Choose one “safe space” in the home where everyone can gather
- Keep lights on if possible and minimize loud storm noises

Say things like:

- “We are safe right now.”
- “I’m here with you.”
- “The storm is outside, and we’re inside together.”

Material in this handout was enhanced with AI through ChatGPT to improve the visual look and include the most relevant and current information available.



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3. Keep Routines When Possible

Familiar routines help calm the nervous system.

- Keep regular mealtimes and bedtime rituals
- Read the usual bedtime story
- Stick to normal rules and expectations with flexibility and compassion

If routines must change, **explain what's happening and what will happen next.**

4. Help Kids Express Feelings

- Let kids talk, draw, or play out their feelings
- Accept emotions without trying to “fix” them
- Avoid minimizing fears (“It’s not a big deal”)

Helpful responses:

- “That sounds really scary.”
- “A lot of people feel worried during storms.”
- “Do you want to tell me what you’re thinking about?”

5. Limit Exposure to Storm Coverage

- Turn off or lower TV/radio news when kids are present
- Avoid repeating scary details about past storms
- Get updates quietly and share only what children need to know

6. Give Kids a Sense of Control

Feeling helpless increases fear.

- Let kids help with safe tasks (gathering blankets, choosing games)
- Offer choices (“Would you like to read or draw?”)
- Teach simple calming tools:

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- Slow breathing
- Counting
- Holding a comfort item

Remember: Connection, consistency, and calm adults are the most powerful tools for healing. You don't have to have all the answers, just being present matters.

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