

FAMILY & PARENT SUPPORT KIT

A deeply supportive guide to help families navigate stress, rebuild stability, and strengthen emotional connection during disaster recovery and beyond.

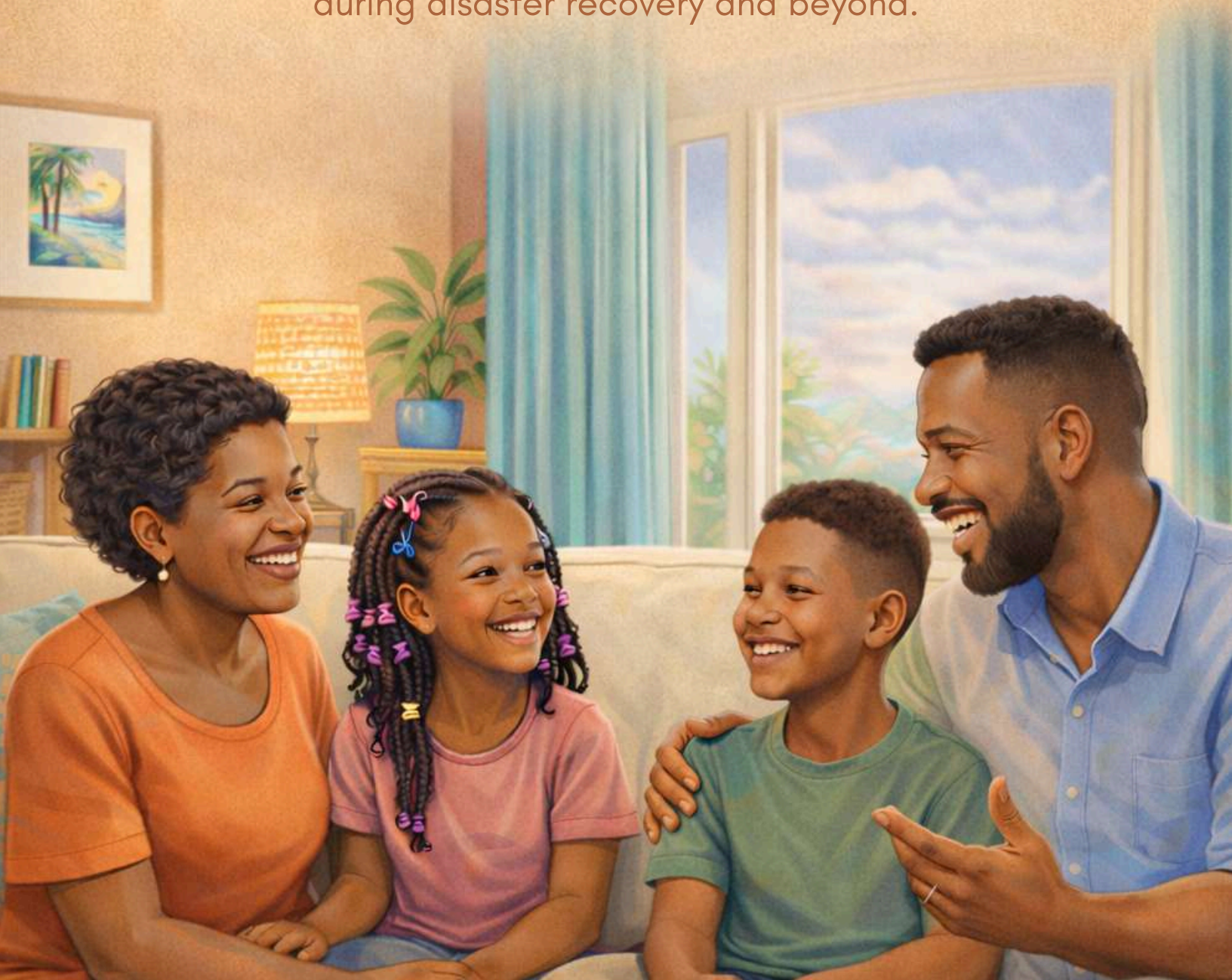


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01

PURPOSE OF THE KIT



Disasters disrupt more than homes and communities—they disrupt **emotional safety, routines, roles, sleep, relationships, and a family's sense of normalcy**.

This kit helps parents and caregivers:

- Understand trauma reactions in both adults and children
- Reduce family conflict during stressful recovery periods
- Use simple grounding and coping tools at home
- Guide children through fear, regression, and uncertainty
- Rebuild routines after displacement or crisis
- Support emotional healing alongside practical recovery tasks
- Identify when professional help is needed

This resource assumes **no clinical training**—it is written for everyday families navigating extraordinary circumstances.

02

UNDERSTANDING FAMILY STRESS DURING DISASTER RECOVERY



How disasters impact families:

- Loss of home, belongings, or community spaces
- Sudden changes in sleeping arrangements
- Crowded living conditions or shelter environments
- Uncertainty about next steps
- Disrupted routines (school, work, childcare)
- Increased financial pressure
- Heightened emotional reactivity

Common family-wide stress patterns:

- Everyone is “on edge”
- Less patience and more arguments
- Parents feeling pressure to stay strong
- Younger children needing more constant attention
- Teens withdrawing or expressing frustration
- Exhaustion from basic survival tasks (clean-up, long lines, forms, transport)

Normal reactions during recovery:

- Overthinking or fear of future disasters
- Difficulty concentrating
- Startled response to loud or unexpected noises
- Feeling overwhelmed by small tasks
- Trouble sleeping
- Emotional “shutting down”

Disasters place families in **survival mode**, not because they are weak, but because their nervous systems are working hard to protect them.

03

HOW DISASTER STRESS SHOWS UP IN CHILDREN (DEVELOPMENTAL GUIDE)



Ages 0–4 (Toddlers & Early Childhood)

- Clinginess, fear of separation
- Sleep trouble, nightmares
- Irritability or crying spells
- **Regression:**
 - Potty accidents
 - Baby talk
 - Wanting bottles/pacifiers again

What helps:

- Physical closeness (holding, rocking, cuddling)
- Predictable mini-routines
- Soft, simple explanations
- Calming sensory tools (blanket, soft toy, song)

Ages 5–7 (Young Children)

- Big emotions, tantrums
- Repetitive questions (“Will it happen again?”)
- Fear of darkness or sleeping alone
- Somatic complaints (tummy aches, headaches)
- Needing reassurance often

What helps:

- Visual schedules
- Calm corners in temporary housing
- Clear, honest answers to questions
- Short grounding activities

Ages 8–12 (Older Children)

- Withdrawal or irritability
- Difficulty focusing on schoolwork
- Worrying about parents or siblings
- Trying to “be strong” but appearing tense
- Nighttime anxiety

What helps:

- Involvement in safe household tasks
- One-on-one check-ins
- Gentle explanations of the recovery timeline
- Opportunities to express emotions through drawing, journaling, or storytelling

Teens

- Mood changes and frustration
- Wanting privacy, independence, or space
- Deep worry about the future
- Feeling embarrassed about being displaced
- Retreating into phones/games
- Helping too much (over-functioning)

What helps:

- Respecting independence where possible
- Asking their opinion on decisions
- Giving roles that promote dignity (helping siblings, organizing supplies)
- Avoiding shaming or minimizing their stress

04

HOW DISASTER STRESS SHOWS UP IN PARENTS & CAREGIVERS



Common emotional reactions:

- Feeling overwhelmed or pressured
- Guilt (“I should be doing more”)
- Emotional numbness
- Anxiety about finances, housing, or safety
- Irritability or snapping easily
- Feeling disconnected from children or partner

Physical symptoms:

- Tightness in chest
- Constant fatigue
- Headaches
- Difficulty sleeping
- Muscle tension
- Low appetite or overeating

Behavioral signs:

- Avoiding conversations
- Becoming overprotective
- Difficulty planning next steps
- Feeling frozen or unsure

Reality check:

These are **common trauma responses**, not signs of inadequacy.

05

TRAUMA-INFORMED FAMILY SUPPORT PRINCIPLES



1. Predictability Creates Calm

Routines and clear expectations reduce anxiety.

2. Connection is More Important than Perfection

Being present matters more than having the “right words.”

3. Behavior is Communication

Especially after disaster:

- Tantrums = overwhelm
- Irritability = fear
- Withdrawal = exhaustion

4. Adults Set the Emotional Tone

Not by hiding emotions, but by **staying steady enough**.

5. Healing Happens Through Relationships

Small moments of care rebuild safety.

06

STABILIZING THE FAMILY AFTER A DISASTER (STEP-BY-STEP)



Step 1: Ensure Basic Needs

Before emotional conversations:

- Food
- Water
- Sleep
- Dry clothes
- Clean space
- Safe shelter

A regulated body supports a regulated mind.

Step 2: Create a Family Safety Ritual

Examples:

- Evening candle/flashlight “closing moment”
- Short prayer or reflection
- One-minute breathing together

Step 3: Rebuild a Smaller, Temporary Routine

Even if housing is unstable:

- Set wake-up time
- Hygiene pattern
- Quiet hour
- Rest breaks
- Simple bedtime routine

Predictability reduces fear.

Step 4: Reduce Sensory Chaos

In shelters or temporary housing:

- Noise-blocking headphones
- Quiet corner
- Soft blanket
- Listening to calming music
- Stepping outside for a breath

Step 5: Establish Daily Check-Ins

Ask:

- “How is your heart today?”
- “Where is your body feeling the stress?”
- “What do you need right now?”

Step 6: Normalize Feelings

Use phrases like:

- “It makes sense that you feel scared.”
- “Many people feel this way after something big happens.”
- “We’re going through this together.”

07

**DAILY COPING TOOLS
FOR FAMILIES**



1. 60-Second Calm Reset

- Inhale 3 seconds
- Hold 1
- Exhale 4
- Repeat 3 times.

2. The Worry Box

Family writes worries and places them inside a box or bag:

- “The worry lives here—not inside us.”

3. Calm-Down Cards

Create cards with:

- Grounding tips
- Breathing exercises
- Comforting statements

Allow children to choose one when overwhelmed.

4. Family Stretch & Release

3–5 minutes:

- Shoulder rolls
- Neck stretches
- Gentle shaking of arms and legs
- Star stretch

5. Family “Strength Moments”

Ask:

- “What went well today?”
- “What helped you feel brave?”

These build resilience.

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BODY-BASED CALMING TOOLS FOR CHILDREN



Butterfly Tap

Cross arms + gentle tapping.

Feet on the Floor

Push feet firmly down:

“The ground is supporting me.”

Starfish Breathing

Trace around fingers:

Inhale up, exhale down.

Ball or Towel Squeeze

Helps release tension safely.

Sensory Soothing

- Cold water
- Soft blanket
- Scented lotion
- Warm drink
- Holding a familiar object

09

**COGNITIVE & EMOTIONAL
COPING TOOLS FOR PARENTS**



Recognizing unhelpful thoughts:

- “I should have prevented this.”
- “My kids are ruined.”
- “I’m failing.”
- “We’ll never recover.”

Helpful reframe options:

- “We are rebuilding one small step at a time.”
- “My children don’t need perfection—just connection.”
- “This is hard, and I am doing my best.”
- “We are not alone.”

3-Question Reality Check

1. Is the thought 100% true?
2. What evidence do I have against it?
3. What is a calmer or more balanced statement?

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TALKING & LISTENING FOR HEALING (DISASTER RECOVERY EDITION)



Conversation Openers

- “What’s been the hardest part of today?”
- “What helped you feel a little better?”
- “Is there anything you’re worried about right now?”
- “What do you wish I understood better?”

Listening Without Fixing

Try:

- “I hear you.”
- “That sounds really tough.”
- “Thank you for telling me.”
- “Would you like a hug or some space?”

Avoid:

- “Stop worrying.”
- “Other people have it worse.”
- “You’re too old for that.”

When Emotions Rise at Home

1. Lower your voice
2. Slow your breathing
3. Speak in short sentences
4. Offer choices
5. Take breaks if needed

Crisis recovery is emotionally draining – families need gentleness.

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REBUILDING FAMILY ROUTINES AFTER DISRUPTION



Morning routine

- Quick hydration
- Emotional check-in
- Simple hygiene
- One grounding tool

After-school or afternoon reset

- Snack
- Rest
- Outdoor time if possible
- Short conversation

Evening routine

- A consistent wind-down
- Calming activity
- Gratitude moment
- Predictable bedtime

Even temporary routines reduce anxiety.

12

STRENGTHENING FAMILY CONNECTION AMID RECOVERY



Connection Activities

- Storytelling
- Short walks
- Card games
- Drawing time
- Group prayer or reflection
- Music moments
- “Rose and thorn” check-ins

Restoring control

Ask children:

- “Would you like to choose dinner?”
- “Which bedtime story tonight?”
- “What should we plan for tomorrow?”

13

PARENTING THROUGH IRRITABILITY, REGRESSION, OR FEAR



For clinginess

- Create a goodbye ritual
- Give small jobs to build independence

For tantrums

- Keep your tone steady
- Offer grounding
- Avoid punishment during overwhelm

For fear at bedtime

- Soft lights or flashlight
- Reassuring phrases
- Routine and predictability

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SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR TEENS POST-DISASTER



Teens need:

- Privacy
- Respect
- Opportunities to help
- Space for big emotions
- Reassurance that their future is not lost

What to avoid:

- Minimizing their stress
- Forcing them to “be strong”
- Comparing them to siblings

How to support:

- Invite them into decisions
- Give meaningful responsibilities
- Ask for their opinion
- Let them express frustration safely

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**SUPPORTING MULTI-
GENERATIONAL HOMES**



Older adults may experience:

- Fear of being a burden
- Difficulty expressing emotions
- Memory lapses during stress
- Sensitivity to noise
- Spiritual distress

What helps:

- Gentle check-ins
- Meaningful roles (folding laundry, reading to children)
- Patience with slowed processing
- Quiet space for rest
- Honoring cultural and faith practices

16

WHEN TO SEEK ADDITIONAL SUPPORT



Seek help if a family member:

- Becomes aggressive, withdrawn, or is non-responsive
- Stops eating or sleeping
- Has intense panic attacks
- Talks about hopelessness or dying
- Experiences hallucinations
- Cannot function day-to-day

Reaching out = strength, not failure.

17

CLOSING MESSAGE FOR FAMILIES



You are doing incredibly meaningful work.

Recovery is not about rushing — it is about rebuilding safety, connection, and hope one small step at a time.

Your love, steadiness, and presence are enough.
Your family will grow through this, not just survive it.