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[New York University Child Study Center](#)

Television viewing of Katrina will have psychological effects on children around the country

NYU Child Study Center provides advice to help children cope with the tragedy

The devastating effects of Hurricane Katrina have been felt across the country during the past weeks. Thousands of children are survivors of Katrina, while millions of others around the country have observed horrific sights via media coverage. Although they were not directly involved with the tragedy, repeated television viewing of the disaster puts these children at high risk for developing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), anxiety and depression.

"Research on the impact of the World Trade Center attack indicates that children who viewed more television news of the attack were two times as likely to develop symptoms of PTSD than children with lower TV exposure," said Harold S. Koplewicz, M.D., Director of the NYU Child Study Center. "Our job as parents is to protect our kids from unnecessary media coverage of this event. Good parents will stop the television."

The NYU Child Study Center recommends that parents limit television viewing of the disaster for children under 12 years of age, and eliminate all viewing when possible. For teenagers ages 12-17 it can be harder to completely eliminate television. Parents should take this opportunity to start a dialogue about the events, making sure kids understand what has occurred and know that they can continue the conversation if future questions or concerns arise.

Kids' questions and concerns are likely to be tough to answer, but as with all important discussions, keeping communication lines open is critical and honesty is essential. Some concerns don't get settled quickly, and more than one conversation may be necessary as events unfold.

"The effects of witnessing or being a victim of Katrina will vary for children depending on their age, how they experienced the event and their ability to understand what has

happened," said Marylene Cloitre, Ph.D., Director of the NYU Child Study Center Institute for Trauma and Stress. "Parents should allow children to express themselves, give them a sense of security, and be open and available to discuss various issues."

The NYU Child Study Center suggests the following advice for parents, family or teachers to help their children cope with the recent tragedy:

- Limit both your own and your children's exposure to television reports of the event.
- Discuss the tragedy, but start by finding out what your child understands about the event. Be available for more than one conversation; children's understanding of events and their questions will change over time.
- Reassure your child of their current safety, and remind them of all the different resources in your community that provide them with safety.
- Maintain as usual a routine as possible. Maintaining normal bedtimes and participating in familiar activities provides children with a sense of normalcy.
- When children receive news of a sad and shocking event it is normal for them to have some fluctuations in mood and irritability. Some children will become more clingy and may seek and need more reassurance and contact with caregivers.
- Help your child regain a sense of control. Let them be proactive by taking them to purchase a toy or other needed goods for a child who was affected by the hurricane.

If you are concerned about your child's reactions to Hurricane Katrina, listen to your parental intuition. A child who has an intense or prolonged reaction, or begins having difficulties at school, with their peers, or at home may need help from a counselor or other mental health professional.

For more information and resources on how to help your child deal with Hurricane Katrina or other traumatic events, visit <http://www.aboutourkids.org/>.

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About the NYU Child Study Center

The NYU Child Study Center is dedicated to the understanding, prevention and

treatment of child and adolescent mental health problems. The Center offers expert psychiatric services for children and families with emphasis on early diagnosis and intervention. The Center's mission is to bridge the gap between science and practice, integrating the finest research with patient care and state-of-the-art training, utilizing an extraordinary new facility and the resources of the world-class New York University School of Medicine. For more information, contact the NYU Child Study Center at (212) 263-6622 or visit <http://www.aboutourkids.org/>.
