

## Helping Children Cope with Natural Disasters: Tips for Parents

The recent disaster in Japan has been upsetting for children and adults alike. The disturbing images of the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear accident have been vividly present via television and the internet.

Although most children will not experience a serious negative response to the disaster, some may. Some children may demonstrate strong reactions to the images of human suffering and loss, as well as the onslaught of the tsunami wave. Some specific reactions of concern include the sudden emergence of the following:

- **Pre-School Children:** sudden thumb-sucking, bedwetting, sleep and appetite disturbances, separation difficulties, fear of the dark and other situations, and breaking from typical behaviors and routines.
- **Elementary School Children:** reporting disaster specific fears, verbal and physical aggression, sleep disturbances, concentration difficulties, and withdrawal from friends and normal activities.
- **Adolescents:** sleeping and eating disturbances, increases in irritability and conflicts, physical complaints, delinquent behavior and poor concentration.

### Tips for Supporting your Child

- Remain calm and reassuring
- Create opportunities for children to talk about and express their thoughts and feelings regarding the disaster
- Limit and closely monitor your child's exposure to media coverage of the disaster
- Spend time discussing what your child has seen and heard via the media
- Involve your child/family in a disaster recovery activity, e.g., donating clothing, money or school supplies to a national or local relief agency
- Help your child to identify coping strategies that helped him/her deal with previous upsetting events
- Take care of yourself, so you may be more able to assist your child in coping with the disaster
- If you are concerned about your child's reactions to the disaster, please contact a school counseling professional

For more information, please contact the Miami Dade County Public Schools Office of Curriculum and Instruction at (305) 995-7315.