



Washington State Association of School Psychologists

Recent weather events have significantly impacted communities across Washington State including widespread flooding in Whatcom, Skagit, Snohomish, King, Chelan, and Okanogan counties, as well as on the Olympic Peninsula. Experiencing a dangerous storm, flood, or other natural disasters can be especially traumatic for children and youth, and the devastation to the familiar environment can be long-lasting and distressing.

Children look to the significant adults in their lives for guidance on how to manage their reactions after the immediate threat is over. Parents, teachers, and other caregivers can help children and youth cope in the aftermath of a natural disaster by remaining calm and reassuring children that they will be alright.

There are a number of common reactions following a natural disaster; however, children's reactions may differ according to age and developmental level.

Preschool—Regressive behaviors, decreased verbalization, increased anxiety.

Elementary—Poor attention/concentration, school avoidance, irritability, clinginess, aggression, somatic complaints, nightmares, social withdrawal.

Middle and High School—Sleeping and eating disturbances, agitation, increase in conflicts, physical complaints, delinquent behavior, and poor concentration.

Several risk factors may impact the severity of a child's reactions. These include exposure to the actual event, personal injury or loss of a loved one, level of parental support, dislocation from their home or community, the level of physical destruction, and pre-existing risks, such as a previous traumatic experience or mental illness.

WSASP recommends the following resources to support students, families, and communities who may be impacted by the recent storms and flooding:

[Helping Children After a Natural Disaster Infographic](#): This infographic from NASP is a useful tool to share with families and community members about how adults can help children manage their reactions after a natural disaster.

[NASP Natural Disasters: Brief Facts and Tips](#): This webpage contains printable fact sheets in English and Spanish to share basic information and tips on supporting students during and after a natural disaster, as well as links to other resources.

[NASP Resources to Assist Recovering From Natural Disasters](#): This guide provides resources for caring for caregivers, suggestions to assist schools to reopen after a disaster, and additional resources for families and educators to support children.

If you are in need of professional support or guidance, please reach out to WSASP by emailing president@wsasp.org.