



## PROTECTING JAPAN'S TSUNAMI CHILDREN

After the 9.0 earthquake and 33 foot high tsunami, [Save the Children's](#) Japanese employees left their posts throughout the world. They were immediately flown home to Japan to help manage rescue efforts in their home country. Along with [UNICEF](#) and other agencies, Save the Children immediately did what they do best - brought in supplies of food and water, and set up child friendly spaces.

Child friendly spaces are clearly designated areas located in evacuation centers, maybe a classroom in a school or a specific tent, or a roped-off section of a room. They are monitored by specially trained staff and local volunteers.

The Save the Children staff is trained to identify children who may be particularly vulnerable, and special training is provided to the local volunteers. While children are in a child friendly space, their parents can register for emergency assistance, and start re-establishing their lives.

Most importantly, child friendly spaces help children play and laugh, feel cared for and safe, be themselves, and begin to recover their resiliency as they cope with their extraordinary experiences. With decades of experience, Save the Children has found these child friendly spaces to truly help children cope and recover. You may want to show your children this reassuring video of a [Japanese child friendly space](#).

Within Japan, many people are actively volunteering to help their compatriots in the tsunami region. Evacuees are stepping forward and helping in their own evacuation centers. Ordinary citizens are donating food and clothing, and landlords are offering rent-free apartments to tsunami families. Sumo wrestlers and other celebrities are going to evacuation centers to help serve meals. Japanese school children have donated over 80,000 books for children in the evacuation centers.

Many tsunami children lost schoolmates and teachers as well as family members. Their schools were destroyed along with their homes. School begins for many children in the end of April, so many evacuated tsunami children will find themselves in new school environments.

Many of the 2,200 evacuation centers spread across the country are located in school facilities, so tsunami children and the children who normally attend those schools will be sharing classes. The discipline and predictability of school days can really help the tsunami children. Meanwhile their families are struggling with decisions on where to live their new life, finding jobs, wondering how much they can trust what the authorities are telling them, deaths of family and friends, loss of their communities.

With entire towns destroyed, along with jobs, schools and neighborhoods, the Japanese government has begun building over 70,000 temporary homes. The Japanese Red Cross is supplying each home with a refrigerator, washing machine, rice cooker, microwave, television and hot water dispenser. The [American Red Cross](#) and others in the global Red Cross network are helping to fund the Japanese Red Cross in this effort.

With generosity, children and families in America and throughout the world are holding fundraisers, making origami cranes to send to children in evacuation centers, and demonstrating their exceptional concern for Japanese tsunami children and their families.

## **HELPING YOUR CHILDREN COPE WITH INTERNATIONAL EMERGENCIES**

When disasters unfold, we often find ourselves riveted to the TV and Internet, being drawn into the human drama unfolding before our eyes. The last 2 years have brought us extraordinary events filled with deep emotions—here is a reminder of 4 major events we all witnessed.

- The rescue of the Chilean miners—We will forever remember our feelings of joy and happiness as each miner emerged from that underground tomb.
- Last year's major volcano eruption in Iceland-- There were amazing images of the power and beauty of nature as the volcano exploded. These were mixed with news stories of how the volcanic ash was closing down air traffic throughout Europe. Those videos of people stranded at airports showed their confusion, frustration and exhaustion as they found themselves caught in the results of a natural disaster occurring far away.
- Haiti's earthquake—The fear and desperation of the Haitian people was broadcast for the world to see. These amazing people struggled for life, their families, water, food, and shelter in a country that collapsed along with the earthquake.
- Japan's earthquake and tsunami—The shock of the power of nature and its devastating effects on children and families in towns and cities in a developed country, along with the immense fear of nuclear meltdown and contamination bring emotions of great compassion along with uncertain knowledge of the fragility of life.

This is a relatively new experience for us humans to figure out how to process all the intense emotions these news reports bring us—confusion, dread, wanting to know what will happen, worrying it could happen to our family, and being surprised by beauty, joy, compassion and empathy, desire to help not knowing how.

As you know, your kids are not immune to these feelings. In fact, for some children their feelings of helplessness may be overwhelming. They watch TV at home, share information with friends, their teachers talk about these disasters. While kids want to know what's going Here are some important tips on helping you and your family navigate these highly emotional major events. The goal is for you and your children to feel less fear and uncertainty, and have more ability to contribute to your own welfare and that of the people in your communities.

- Every day, tell your children you love them. Address their fears of being separated from you by telling them that no matter what happens, you will always look for them no matter how long it takes. Tell them they can always ask for help in looking for you.
- Give each child extra time and attention. Your close personal attention can truly help them feel safe and secure. Special play dates, stories at bed time, etc can really make a difference. Younger children

will depend on you to interpret disaster information, while older children will be able to understand and draw their own conclusions. Because of this, teens are the ones that often need special attention.

- Make sure your children know your full name and cell phone numbers, and your address, just as we advise in our Child Safety Kit. If necessary for their emotional well being, you can make a contact information/id card they can carry during this stressful time.
- Manage TV and Internet time. Information overload really does lead to overwhelming emotions, for kids as well as teens and adults. When watching replayed videos of the event, smaller children easily get confused and may think that it is continually happening again and again. For older children and adults, it's easy to be so caught up in the emotions of the event that the patterns of everyday life get disrupted.
- Children often seem to have a special bond with other children who are at risk. Encourage this sense of concern and compassion. Tell them the positive news that people around the world are responding with generosity and special help. Everything that can be done, is being done. Make sure they hear concrete examples of how children and families are being helped. You can show them the video in the story above on child friendly spaces. You can also find stories of amazing rescues, like this story of the [Japanese dog rescued after 3 weeks at sea](#). This information helps children (and you) regain a sense of control and security.
- Disaster specialists have discovered that the more children and adults participate in everyday life patterns, the better. Your job is to do what you do best, get them to school and their normal after school activities. Help them refresh their normal life patterns, so they can be better grounded and feel secure. Children will follow your lead, so be a model for them.
- Provide opportunities for your children to volunteer to help. Taking the family to a vigil for disaster victims can be very empowering to a young child because they witness the power of community and that other people really do care. Older children may find an activity that speaks to them and create their own path to positive action.
  - When you donate online, you may want to make it a family event. Have your children watching as you donate. You are providing a living example of lifelong generosity by doing this.
  - Make the donation in honor of your children. Many major non-profits like the Polly Klaas® Foundation have online donation forms with options to donate in honor of someone, here is our [honoring donation form](#).
  - Notice how you can type your children's names as the honorees, along with their mailing address. At the Polly Klaas® Foundation, we mail a special letter to the honorees informing them of donations made in their name. When the letter arrives, make sure your kids see it and display it in the house. Your children will have concrete tangible evidence of how their family has helped people caught up in a disaster and contributed to the welfare of others.

Continually remind your children about the resiliency of the human spirit. That with the support of others, children, adults and families can recover from the most extraordinary circumstances. Knowing that recovery is possible, that children and adults can have amazing resiliency, can help children restore their own emotional sense of control, safety, and normality. You may want to show your children this video of a very [admirable 12 year old Japanese boy sharing his tsunami experiences](#). on, oftentimes the emotional overload may be too much for them. Just as it is for adults.

