

After the Disaster: A Children's Mental Health Checklist

Disasters can be particularly traumatic to children. Sometimes, it can be difficult to determine the extent of the psychological trauma, and whether or not professional mental health services are indicated. This checklist is one way to assess a child's mental health status three weeks or more after a disaster.

Note: Call your child's doctor, regardless of your child's score, if you feel that he needs counseling, or if you need help coping. Pre-occupation with death, unusual accident proneness or suicidal threats are reasons for immediate consultations. It is also recommended that any child who has been seriously injured or who has lost a parent, sibling or caregiver by death have a psychological evaluation and/or brief therapy.

How to use this checklist

Tally the pluses and minuses to obtain a final score. If the child scores more than 35, it is suggested you seek a mental health consultation.

1. **Has the child had more than one major stress within a year before this disaster, such as a death in the family, a molestation, a major physical illness or divorce?** If yes: +5
2. **Does the child have a network of supportive, caring persons who continue to relate to him daily?** If yes: -10
3. **Has the child had to move out of his house because of the disaster?** If yes: +5
4. **Was there reliable housing within one week of the disaster with resumption of the usual household members living together?** If yes: -10
5. **Is the child showing severe disobedience or delinquency?** If yes: +5

Is the child showing any of the following as new behaviors for more than three weeks after the disaster?

6. **Nightly states of terror?** +5
7. **Waking from dreams confused or in a sweat?** +5
8. **Difficulty concentrating?** +5
9. **Extreme irritability?** +5
10. **Loss of previous achievements in toilet or speech?** +5
11. **Onset of stuttering or lisping?** +5
12. **Persistent severe anxiety or phobias?** +5
13. **Obstinacy?** +5
14. **New or exaggerated fears?** +5
15. **Rituals or compulsions?** +5
16. **Severe clinging to adults?** +5
17. **Inability to fall asleep or stay asleep?** +5

- 18. Startling at any reminder of the disaster? +5
- 19. Loss of ambition for the future? +5
- 20. Loss of pleasure in usual activities? +5
- 21. Loss of curiosity? +5
- 22. Persistent sadness or crying? +5
- 23. Persistent headaches or stomachaches? +5
- 24. Hypochondria? +5
- 25. Has anyone in the child's immediate family been killed or severely injured in the disaster (including severe injury to the child)? +15

Results

Total the score. If your child's score is:

0 to 34 points: Your child's score on this checklist does not indicate the need for a mental health evaluation. However, you should talk with a mental health professional or your child's doctor if you think he needs counseling, you need help coping and/or the child was seriously injured or lost a close family member or caregiver by death. An immediate consultation is needed if your child is preoccupied with death, is unusually prone to accidents or makes suicidal threats. Use your responses to this checklist to point out areas of concern for your child. The mental health professional or your child's doctor will direct you to resources that can help your child recover.

35 to 105 points: You should talk with a mental health professional or your child's doctor, especially if you answered yes to the last question. An immediate consultation is needed if your child is preoccupied with death, is unusually prone to accidents or makes suicidal threats. Use your responses to this checklist to point out areas of concern for your child. The mental health professional or your child's doctor will direct you to resources that can help your child recover.

Source: Federal Emergency Management Agency