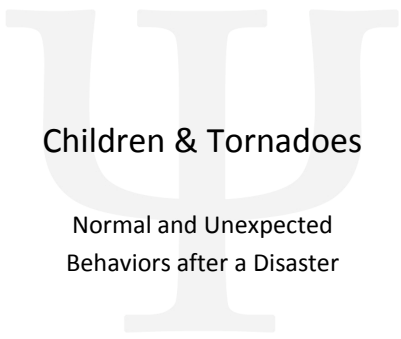


dr. caleb lack's

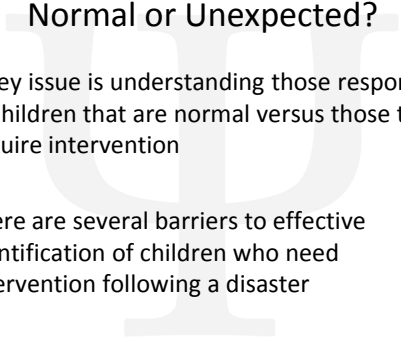


Children & Tornadoes

Normal and Unexpected Behaviors after a Disaster

psychology

dr. caleb lack's



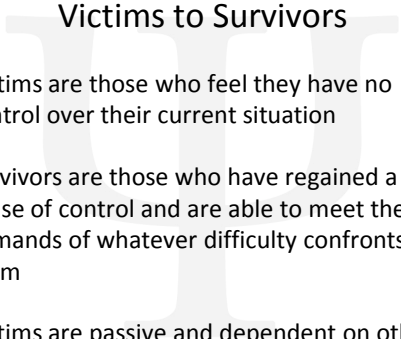
Normal or Unexpected?

A key issue is understanding those responses in children that are normal versus those that require intervention

There are several barriers to effective identification of children who need intervention following a disaster

psychology

dr. caleb lack's



Victims to Survivors

Victims are those who feel they have no control over their current situation

Survivors are those who have regained a sense of control and are able to meet the demands of whatever difficulty confronts them

Victims are passive and dependent on others, survivors are active and involved

psychology

dr. caleb lack's

Barriers

There are two **myths** about children who have experienced disasters:

Children are innately resilient and will quickly recover, even from extreme trauma

Children are not disturbed by disasters unless their parents have strong responses

psychology

dr. caleb lack's

Barriers

Teachers and parents may misinterpret problematic behavior as just being willful

Adults may not wish to be reminded of their own reactions, and thus ignore or minimize a child's reaction

Most children respond appropriately to a disaster, which leads some to think that all the children are doing so

psychology

dr. caleb lack's

Barriers

A strong response to a disaster or trauma is *normal and expected*

Up to 90% of children show psychological reactions immediately after a disaster, 20-50% show reactions up to a year later

Majority of these children will not need services other than care and support from family, friends, and school

psychology

dr. caleb lack's

How Children React

Three phases of a child's reaction to a disaster:

1. During the disaster
2. Immediately following the disaster
3. Long-term reactions to the disaster

Certain types of reactions are normal during each phase

psychology

dr. caleb lack's

During the Disaster

When confronted with a trauma, children have the "fight or flight" response:

Muscles tense, heart pounds
Nerves are on high alert
Intense anxiety or fear
Shock, sense of unreality, not understanding what is happening

psychology

dr. caleb lack's

Immediately Following

In the weeks after a trauma, up to 90% of children may experience

- Heightened physiological arousal
- Diffuse anxiety
- Survivor guilt
- Emotional lability

These are all normal reactions and should be met with understanding and support

psychology

dr. caleb lack's

Long-Term

By 1-2 years post-disaster, the majority of children will show few problematic symptoms

A time to watch out for, however, is the anniversary of the disaster

Those children still displaying the following difficulties 3-4 months after the disaster may need further assessment

psychology

dr. caleb lack's

Symptoms of Concern

In children below age 6, these may indicate problematic adjustment to the disaster

- Generalized anxiety about separation, strangers, or sleep problems
- Avoidance of certain situations
- Preoccupation with certain symbols / words
- Limited emotional expression or play activities
- Loss of previously acquired skills

psychology

dr. caleb lack's

Symptoms of Concern

For older children, warning signs of problematic adjustment are

- Repetitious play reenacting a part of the disaster
- Preoccupation with danger or expressed concerns about safety
- Sleep disturbances and irritability
- Anger outbursts or aggressiveness
- Excessive worry about family or friends

psychology

dr. caleb lack's

Symptoms of Concern

- School avoidance, particularly involving somatic complaints
- Behaviors characteristic of younger children
- Changes in personality, withdrawal, and loss of interest in activities

One or more of these may be indicative of a maladaptive response to the disaster – of being a victim rather than a survivor

psychology

dr. caleb lack's

Vulnerable Populations

Those whose experience was especially terrifying or extreme

Children between 5-10 years of age, especially if separated from parents

Those with a prior history of any type of traumatic experience

Those without strong social support networks

psychology

dr. caleb lack's

What Teachers Can Do


Familiarize yourself with the expected and unexpected reactions children may have

If there are children you feel are exhibiting unexpected or extreme reactions, meet with their parents and discuss it

Referral either to school counselors / school psychologists, or to outside agencies may be in order for further assessment or intervention

psychology

dr. caleb lack's



Questions or Comments?

psychology
