Prof: Tips to help children cope with earthquake, tsunami tragedy

March 15 2011, by Amy Pattereson Neubert

The damage from the Japan earthquake and Pacific Ocean tsunami may be thousands of miles away, but the disaster can affect children around the world, says a Purdue University children's expert.

"The television, Internet and other media outlets are saturated with images of the tragic earthquake and tsunami, so it is inevitable that children will notice saomething about the event," says Judith Myers-Walls, professor emerita in human development and family studies. "Parents and child-care providers need to be aware of how this endless stream of information and images can affect a child."

Some tips to help children cope include:

* Help reassure children by teaching them what they can do to prepare for disasters.

* Provide factual information to children. Answer their questions or look up information with them.

* It can help children and adults to do something to help those affected by disaster. Look for simple and concrete things that children can do to support the families in Japan and other affected areas.

* Follow the child's lead. Stop talking about the situation when the child seems satisfied.

* Be prepared to discuss at any time.

* It is not appropriate for young children to see many of the graphic images of destruction.

* Adults should be cautious of watching the news when the children appear too busy with other things. They may likely be watching or listening while playing.

* The younger the child, the less likely they will benefit from news coverage.

* It is good for older children to learn about current events, but the intense news coverage may not be the best way for them to learn.

* A better way to inform children about the events may be with print media or photographs because they allow parents to preview the content.

* Sometimes it's a good idea to turn off the television and news reports, and instead play a game or go outside.

Provided by Purdue University

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