

Be calm, factual and supportive. And turn off the TV.

CHILD MIND INSTITUTE

With many schools closed, supermarkets cleaned out, low-lying areas evacuated, and the airwaves filled with dramatic talk about Hurricane Sandy, children may well be anxious about what the next few days may bring.

Adults are anxious, too, and in the storm's path have been preparing to keep their families safe. Seeing those preparations and being allowed to help is one way to help kids stay calm and not be overwhelmed by worries. Here are some other pointers for helping children who are anxious feel more comfortable.

1. Stay cool. Remember that kids absorb the attitudes and emotions of their parents. So be aware of your reactions and words, and model being calm. If you're talking to other adults around the kids, don't air your anxiety or go into potentially troubling possibilities. Excited, nervous talk may translate to anxious kids as frightening.
2. Turn off the TV. TV stations love to obsess on extreme weather, and send anchor people out to stand in front of churning waves or in hip-deep water. While you might want to leave the TV on to monitor Sandy's progress, repeat coverage may fuel kids' anxiety. Turn it off if at all possible, and especially if the kids seem distressed by it or are asking the same questions over and over.
3. Find out what their fears and fantasies are. Ask kids what they know about hurricanes and give them a chance to ask questions. Facts can help them settle down, and give them a more realistic sense of what a hurricane might bring wherever you live.
4. Make sure they know that most hurricanes are not like Katrina. Depending on where you live, Katrina could very well be the only hurricane your kids have heard of. If that's the case, you

want to explain how very, very unusual that was. While winds and rain and flooding can be serious indeed, the disaster and loss of life in New Orleans was due to a confluence of factors (dare we say a perfect storm) that it's hard to imagine ever happening again.

5. Emphasize safety measures. Let kids know that we have an emergency response system that monitors storms closely and, especially in the wake of Katrina, gives people good advice on how to stay safe, whether it means evacuating a potential flood zone or just staying indoors.

6. Be age appropriate. Young kids who've never heard of Katrina don't need to know how devastating a hurricane, at worst, can be. They just need to know that we don't take chances with powerful storms and take steps to stay safe.

7. Do something fun. If you're going to be riding out the storm indoors, organize some family-centered activities to help distract kids from their fears. Doing something with you will make them feel more secure, time will go faster, and they'll have positive memories to help counter storm-related fears next time.