**ESL 10055 Talking to Children about Disasters**

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Welcome to Spotlight. I am Robin Basserlen and I am Brian Guestmark.

Spotlight uses a special English method of broadcasting. It is easier for people to understand no matter where in the world they live.

It was December 26, 2004. Ying was 11 years old on this day she watched the last wave of water destroyed her village in the country of Thailand. This tsunami damaged hundreds of times in 14 south Asian countries. The physical damages of the Indian Ocean tsunami was huge. In all, this major nature disaster killed over two hundred of thousand people. Many other people were injured or lost their homes. But the damage from the tsunami was not just physical. Survivors and even people out side of South Asia suffer emotionally especially children. This was true for Ying and many other children around the world.

It is normal for children to fear terrible events like natural disasters. For Anna, she feared tsunami because she experienced once. But a child does not have to experience a terrible event to be upgrade of it. In fact, children often hear about disasters at school or through radio and television. This is why adults must be prepare to talk to children when natural disasters happen.

Today spotlight is on how to talk to children about natural disasters.

There are many kind of natural disasters: tsunami, earthquake, fire and even the strong wind and rain of a hurricane or cyclone. These natural forces can be powerful and deadly. People often fear them because they cannot control them. Children fear natural disasters for the same reasons. Here are 6 things adults can do when children show fear about natural disasters.

First, adults should willing to talk with children. It may seems a bad idea to talk to children about things that make them afraid. However children are often more afraid when adults avoid their questions or talk quietly with other adults about a disaster. Experts say “It is better to talk about fears than to act like they do not exit”. When children are permitted to talk about their fears, they feel safer. Sometimes, the best things and adults can do is just listen. Children will talk about what frighten them. They may be afraid that a natural disaster will ruin in their home. Or they maybe afraid that their family will get hurt by one. Whatever the fear, it is important to listen and be patient with the child.

Second, let’s children ask questions. They may want to know what will happen if a natural disaster comes to their home. What will they do? Where will they go? What will happen to their friends? When answering their questions it’s best to give short honest answer. If you do not know the answer, you can be honest and say that you do not know.

Third, it’s important to wait and help a child is ready to talk about a natural disaster. Adults should not force children to talk especially if they are not showing sign of being afraid.

Fourth, help the child the old safe. There are many ways to do this. One way is very simple and adults can tell a frighten child that they love them, they may also want to spend more time with the child. It’s also important for the child to do the same things they do everyday. Simple things like going to school and eating dinner can help a child feel normal even when he is struggling with fear.

There are also fun game adults can play to help children feel safe. The United States National Institute of Help suggests a game call “Tide that bine”. In this game, a family or group sit together in a circle. They use a ball made of long, thin rope called string. Each person in the circle takes a turn holding the ball of string. The first person explains one-way they help another person in the circle. For example, a person could say “I help Marry take care of her cat” then the first person hold on to the end of the string and they passed the ball to the second person. The second person now said how they help a different person in the circle, they continue holding onto the string then they passed the ball to a new person. The group keeps passing the ball until everyone in the circle has talked about how they help each other. When they are finished, everyone will be connected by the piece of string. This simple game shows that everyone in the group is safe because they are not alone, they are surrounded by people who help them.

Fifth, use activities to help children communicate their fears. For example, a child can create a picture then she can talk to an adult about the picture and what it represents. Children can also perform a play or they can use play play dolls or animals to speak for them. Children can also write short stories about what they saw or how they feel about natural disasters.

... was 13 when the Indian Ocean Tsunami ruined in her house in Srylanka. One year later, she was still struggling emotionally. She did not like to visit her ruined house and she did not want to talk about the problems her family had. However, she loved to write and she often shared her feelings about the tsunami in her poems. Writing poems was a way for her to share her fears since she did not like to do talk about them.

Doctor John ... is a sociologist, a doctor who helps people with mental and emotional issues. On the website Sociology Today, he wrote these encouraging words about children and disasters “If they have a strong support system, knowledge that everything will be fine. And extra love and care from the family, children will usually recover fully from a disaster.”

However, sometimes children will have problems dealing with natural disasters no matter what adults do to help them. Therefore the sixth things adults can do is what for serious changes in the child behavior. For example, a child may refuse to go to school or play with other children or a child may demonstrate negative behavior like fighting. This may be signs that the child needs more help.

Dr. Cold said that adults who notices such changes should see expert help for the child. A mental help expert can help the child process his emotions and the expert can help the child understand his thoughts about the disaster.

Natural disasters are terrible events. They are difficult for adults and children but adults should not be afraid to talk to children about natural disasters. Talking cannot stops natural disasters from happening but talking can help children feel more safe and less afraid of the future.

The writer of this program was Lauren Lander. The producer was Brian Guestma. The voices you heard were from the United States. All quotes were adapted and voiced by spotlight. You can find out the program on the internet at [www.radioenglish.net](http://www.radioenglish.net). This program is called “Talking to children about disasters”

We hope you can join us again for the next spotlight program.