Welcome to Spotlight. I’m Robin Basselin. And I’m Ryan Geerstma. 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 26th, 2004. Ing was 11 years old. On this day, she watched a large wave of water destroy her village in the country of Thailand. This tsunami damaged hundreds of towns, in 14 South Asian countries. The physical damage of the Indian Ocean tsunami was huge. In all, this major natural disaster killed over 200,000 people. Many other people were injured or lost their homes. But the damage from the tsunami was not just physical. Survivors and even people outside of South Asia suffered emotionally - especially children. This was true for Ing and for many other children around the world. It is normal for children to fear terrible events like natural disasters. For Ing, she feared tsunamis because she experienced one. But a child does not have to experience a terrible event to be afraid of it. In fact, children often hear about disasters at school or through radio and television. This is why adults must be prepared to talk to children when natural disasters happen. Today’s Spotlight is on how to talk to children about natural disasters. There are many kinds of natural disasters - tsunamis, earthquakes, fires 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 these same reasons. Here are five things adults can do when children show fear about natural disasters. First, adults should be willing to talk with children. It may seem like 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 exist. When children are permitted to talk about their fears, they feel safer. Sometimes, the best thing an adult can do is just listen. Children will talk about what frightens them. They may be afraid that a natural disaster will ruin their home. Or they may be 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 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 is best to give short, honest answers. If you do not know the answer, you can be honest and say that you do not know. Third, it is important to wait until a child is ready to talk about a natural disaster. Adults should not force children to talk - especially if they are not showing signs of being afraid. Fourth, help the child feel safe. There are many ways to do this. One way is very simple: an adult can tell a frightened child that they love them. They may also want to spend more time with the child. It is also important for the child to do the same things they do every day. 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 games adults can play to help children feel safe. The United States’ National Institute of Health suggests a game called “Ties That Bind.” In this game, a family or group sits 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 Mary take care of her cat.” Then, the first person holds onto the end of the string. And they pass the ball to the second person. The second person now says how they help a different person in the circle. They continue holding onto the string. Then they pass 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 dolls or animals to speak for them. Children can also write short stories about what they saw or how they feel about natural disasters. Heshani was 13 when the Indian Ocean tsunami ruined her house in Sri Lanka. 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 talk about them. Dr. John A. Call is a psychologist, a doctor who helps people with mental and emotional issues. On the website Psychology 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 thing adults can do is watch for serious changes in the child’s behavior. For example, a child may refuse to go to school or play with other children. Or a child may demonstrate negative behaviour - like fighting. These may be signs that a child needs more help. Dr. Call says that adults who notice such changes should seek expert help for the child. A mental health 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 can not stop 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 Anders. The producer was Ryan Geertsma. The voices you heard were from the United States. All quotes were adapted and voiced by Spotlight. You can find our programs on the internet at www.radioenglish.net. This program is called, “Talking to Children about Disasters.” We hope you can join us again for the next Spotlight program.