



**“Time is of the essence in the search for a missing child.”**

Ernie Allen  
President and CEO,  
National Center for  
Missing & Exploited  
Children

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## Missing Children: Getting Home After Disaster Strikes

Ernie Allen, president and CEO of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC), discussed child abduction and exploitation with educators at the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools 2005 national conference. At the conference, held Aug. 15–17, he described the increasing dangers children face and some of the effective ways educators can promote child safety.

Two weeks later the United States faced the largest incident of missing children in the country’s history, as Hurricane Katrina had landed on the Gulf Coast. NCMEC found itself involved in the largest recovery and reunification mission in its 21-year existence. And educators put Allen’s advice to work.

### Response and Recovery

While full recovery in the Gulf Coast region will take years, one critical aspect of initial relief efforts is complete. All 5,192 children reported missing to NCMEC following hurricanes Katrina and Rita have been reunited with their families.

Within one week of Hurricane Katrina, NCMEC launched the Katrina Missing Persons Hotline and Web site to help locate and reunite missing persons. At the request of the

U.S. Department of Justice, NCMEC set up the hotline and began to search alongside the state-level missing child clearinghouses, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and state and local law enforcement agencies.

The hotline operated from 8 a.m. to midnight every day for six and a half months, logging more than 34,000 calls to offer reports and leads. The hotline was staffed by 40 retired law enforcement officers.

NCMEC’s Web site posted photographs, names, and physical descriptions of missing and found children and adults from hurricane-affected areas. The site, [www.missingkids.com](http://www.missingkids.com), peaked at 10 to 20 million hits a day, up from 1 million hits on an average day.

### Team Adam

In addition to creating the hotline and Web site, NCMEC sent 20 Team Adam consultants to the Gulf Coast to help reunite missing and displaced children with their families. Modeled after the National Transportation Safety Board, Team Adam was created in 2003 to send retired law enforcement officers to help on-site during a missing child incident. On call 24 hours a day, Team Adam consultants travel throughout the country

to work with local law enforcement during critical cases.

Team Adam is named for Adam Walsh, a 6-year-old boy who was abducted and murdered in 1981. His parents, John and Revé, are champions for child safety and cofounders of NCMEC.

For two months Team Adam consultants helped Gulf Coast residents by filing missing persons reports, taking photos and uploading them to the Web site, and following leads. The consultants spent countless hours working from case files with few details, talking to anyone who might have information. They spent a lot of time talking to children and adults in shelters, and they spent a lot of time knocking on doors to interview those remaining.

### New Territory

Following hurricanes Katrina and Rita there were an unprecedented number of missing children, which forced NCMEC and local and federal agencies to respond in new ways.

For NCMEC this meant a break from its usual procedures in which law enforcement, parents, or legal guardians initiate the miss-

## Missing Children (continued)



Ernie Allen talks about child safety at the OSDFS 2005 national conference. Photo courtesy of OSDFS.

**“This was a coordinated effort made possible by the dedication of many.”**  
**Ernie Allen**

ing person’s case. During the hurricane relief, the center often opened cases on entire families based on calls from relatives who said they hadn’t heard from anyone in the family after the storms.

Families were separated during the storms, during rescues, or while waiting for evacuation, and many children ended up in shelters hundreds or thousands of miles from home. They had no idea where their families were and no way to reach them.

Evacuees were spread across 48 states and the District of Columbia, and there was no centralized database keeping track of each person’s whereabouts. It was common to find a child in a Texas shelter whose parents were at a shelter in Louisiana or Georgia. And while the majority of missing children were safe, shelters and caregivers had no easy or efficient way of easing worried minds.

Another complication was that floodwaters destroyed photos, birth certificates, and other vital records. And afterward many children were staying with relatives or unrelated guardians who didn’t necessarily have critical information to help reunite children with their parents. Proving identification and custody was sometimes difficult.

The most difficult cases involved the young children who became separated from caregivers and arrived at shel-

ters with no adult supervision. Many of the littlest ones were too shocked or scared to remember their names or any information that could help investigators find their parents. NCMEC assisted with 45 cases of unaccompanied children, all of which were resolved by early October.

Many partner agencies helped NCMEC to put the separated families back together. In addition to working with federal and state law enforcement agencies, NCMEC worked with the American Red Cross, Angel Flight America (a nonprofit network of private pilots who provide free flights for medical treatment or during national crises), and the media during recovery.

Volunteers gathered information and comforted evacuees at shelters. Some families were reunited through donated flights. CNN and the CBS network donated airtime to photos and stories of missing children.

Magazine and newspaper articles made it possible for people around the country to help reconnect families. Many times a student or teacher recognized a transplanted child from a story or a photo and then contacted NCMEC to give the child’s new whereabouts.

Schools played a vital role by welcoming displaced students as quickly as possible after the storms. Schools were able to enroll evacuees without the usual documentation, giving

students some normalcy while trying to find their families.

Several NCMEC corporate sponsors, such as American Airlines, Canon USA, Sprint Nextel, and Lifetouch National School Studios, provided valuable equipment and services such as cameras, cell phones, and school photos.

### Day of Celebration

The last missing child was reunited with her family on March 16, 2006. Cortez Stewart, who is 4 years old, became separated from her mother, Lisa, and five siblings during the evacuation of New Orleans. Cortez was with her godmother, Felicia Williams, and went to Atlanta while her mom and siblings ended up in Houston.

During those six months, both mother and godmother were trying to find each other but had no luck until NCMEC became involved. Using information from the godmother’s former employer and expansive databases, NCMEC found the godmother’s relatives in Georgia. From there, the U.S. Postal Inspection Service helped NCMEC find the godmother’s correct address and phone number.

The reunion marked a day of celebration and triumph according to Ernie Allen. “We are thrilled the National Center could play such a vital role in bringing families together in the aftermath of such a devastating disaster.” ■

## Hurricane Relief Efforts For Education in the Gulf Coast

More than 1,100 schools along the Gulf Coast were closed within weeks of the start of classes this school year. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita left 372,000 students unable to attend school and many of them homeless.

Since September, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) has responded with relief efforts to ensure that these students continue their education with the least disruption. Working closely with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the agency responsible for temporary facilities and rebuilding schools, ED has organized funding, supplies, policy waivers, and resources to help relief and recovery efforts.

To help rebuild K–12 education across the devastated region, President Bush signed the *Hurricane Education Recovery Act* into law in December. The legislation authorized \$1.4 billion for three new grant programs to help public and private schools to reopen as quickly and effectively as possible.

In January, U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings announced that more than \$253 million from the *Immediate Aid to Restart School Operations* program was available to the state education agencies (SEAs)

in Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, and Texas.

These four SEAs will use this funding to help local school districts and nonpublic schools defray expenses related to the reopening and restart of operations. Funds also will aid the reenrollment of students in the elementary and secondary schools that serve hurricane disaster areas.

In March, Secretary Spellings and Federal Coordinator of Gulf Coast Rebuilding Donald Powell announced that \$1.1 billion in funding remained, including an additional \$496 million for the restart program.

The *Hurricane Education Recovery Act* also funds two other grant programs:

- The *Emergency Impact Aid for Displaced Students* program provides \$645 million to assist local education agencies with the cost of educating displaced students enrolled in public and nonpublic schools during the 2005–06 school year.

Forty-nine states and the District of Columbia are eligible for funding under this program.

- The *Assistance for Homeless Youths* program provides \$5 million in funding to SEAs to

address the needs of homeless students displaced by hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

In addition to funding, ED created a Web site called Hurricane Help for Schools to serve as a clearinghouse for information, resources, supplies, and donations. Schools can post their needs, and agencies or individuals can donate supplies. As of March, more than 650 matches were made using the site.

In March, six months into the recovery, K–12 enrollment in New Orleans was about 30 percent of what it was before the hurricanes. ED and other federal agencies continue to “do what it takes” to help rebuild. ■

**\$1.4 billion has been set aside to rebuild and improve the education system in the Gulf Coast.**



Secretary Spellings visits displaced students at Pin Oak Middle School in Houston.  
Photo courtesy of U.S. Department of Education.

### *U.S. Department of Education Resources: Hurricane Help for Schools*

Visit [www.hurricanehelpforschools.gov](http://www.hurricanehelpforschools.gov) for the following ED resources:

- Information on *Hurricane Ed. Recovery Act* Programs
- Immediate Funding for Hurricane-Affected Schools
- *Hurricane Education Recovery Act* (Dec. 30 Policy Letter)
- Postsecondary Students, Borrowers and Schools
- Tips for Helping Students Recovering From Traumatic Events
- Trauma Hotline
- School Building Information

# Tips for Helping Students to Recover From Traumatic Events

## TIPS FOR PARENTS

Children will react in their own way and in their own time to their disaster experience. Most reactions are normal and typically go away with time. Parents should be observant and consider professional help, though, if severe reactions persist.

- Comfort clinging children and reassure them they are safe—once they feel safe, they'll begin to let go.
- Listen when children need to talk about a traumatic experience.
- Provide opportunities for children to feel in control when their environment has felt out of control—such as choosing food, clothes, what games to play.
- If children have trouble sleeping after a traumatic event, provide a temporary change in sleeping arrangements, and then move back to pre-disaster bedtime routines.
- Children feel safe if normal rules apply during traumatic events.
- Visit a new school with your child before enrollment.
- Establish daily routines as soon as possible.

## TIPS FOR TEACHERS

Teachers are among the most important adults in the transition and recovery of students affected by a natural disaster or other crisis. Their efforts will begin to give students a sense of stability, security, and belonging. Not only will students look to teachers for support, but the learning process and social environment of the classroom can contribute to students' ability to cope.

- Ensure that displaced students feel welcomed and supported and that they are not bullied or ostracized.
- Reassure students that they will be okay.
- Maintain consistent and fair discipline.
- Provide flexibility such as extra time to do work.
- Show empathy for what they are going through and make time to listen.
- Allow them to keep in contact with others who survived the disaster.
- Provide a variety of methods and opportunities to express their reactions for the disaster.
- Create opportunities for students to help others.

## TIPS FOR ADMINISTRATORS

The early decisions educators make during a crisis will have far-reaching implications for both displaced students and the overall school climate.

- Support parents who have difficulty separating from their children.
- Sponsor parent gatherings so parents have a place to meet each other.
- Recognize a wide range of students during assemblies with a special focus on making new students feel valued.
- Provide extra support for staff, including staff development for helping disaster victims, as well as time for teachers to meet and share frustrations.
- Be flexible and adaptable in an interim dynamic environment.

# Engage Students to Keep Schools Safe and Drug-free

By Terry Pickeral



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Today, more than any other time in our country's history, schools struggle to create safe learning environments for students. Policymakers, education leaders, teachers, and program administrators recognize critical roles each play in implementing effective programs. Unfortunately, students are often absent from these deliberations and decisions.

It is particularly worthwhile engaging students in policies and practices to create safe and drug-free learning environments. With more ownership for decisions, students will be more supportive.

Students can contribute to school deliberations and decisions when the following elements are in place: genuine op-

portunities, sufficient preparation, honest feedback focused on improvement, and a culture and climate of encouragement and equity.

Consider engaging students using the *ABCs of Engagement: Affective, Behavioral, Cognitive*. Affect, or emotion, is how students feel (enthusiasm, pride, or interest); behavior is what students do (persistence, effort, or attention); and cognition is how students think (information processing, problem solving).

The greater degree to which students manifest positive affect, behavior, and cognition, the more connected they feel to school. This connection contributes to safe and healthy school environments.

But, how can schools promote engagement? Positive student characteristics include their beliefs about competence and control, setting goals, and valuing education and social connections. School factors include the school climate, school organization and size, school composition, and classroom instruction.

Students from the Nursery Road Elementary School in Columbia, South

Carolina, exemplify this concept. They have spoken about their success in student engagement at various events, including the OSDFS national conference last summer. Students can contribute great ideas to school safety when given the opportunity, they said.

The students described their work in creating a school constitution focused on respect, safety, health, and achievement. Their school has seen positive outcomes from the collaborative process and from promoting the constitution's values.

If we are to create and sustain safe and drug-free schools, according to the Nursery Road students, the work starts with a focus on students. This ensures not only safe and drug-free schools but also safe and drug-free students now and adults in the future. ■

*Terry Pickeral is executive director of the National Center for Learning and Citizenship.*

According to the National Research Council, schools are more effective when they offer the following:

- Challenging, individualized curriculum focused on understanding;
- Knowledgeable, skilled, and caring teachers;
- Learning-centered school culture;
- Supportive school community that provides a sense of belonging and opportunities to work with engaged peers;
- Strong ties linking schools to families and communities;
- Organizational structure and services that address students' nonacademic needs;
- Opportunities to learn the value of schoolwork for future education and career prospects.



## Good to Know...

When a grantee receives a new grant, copies of the final proposal should be sent to everyone who will be working on the project. It's important that everyone involved is made aware of the project expectations.



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## OSDFS Funding Opportunities

The following grant opportunities from the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools are still available as of June 1:

### **School-Based Student Drug-Testing Programs—84.184D**

Funds are available to develop, implement, or expand school-based drug-testing programs for students in grades 6 through 12.

This program funds 12 grants, with an average award of \$170,000. Contact: Robyn Disselkoen at [osdfsdrugtesting@ed.gov](mailto:osdfsdrugtesting@ed.gov). Learn more at [www.ed.gov/programs/drugtesting/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/programs/drugtesting/index.html).

### **Emergency Response and Crisis Management Plans—84.184E**

Funds are available to local education agencies to develop, strengthen, and enhance emergency response and crisis management plans. This includes training, exercises, purchasing equipment, and hiring contractors.

This program funds 105 grants, ranging from \$100,000 to \$500,000. Contact: Tara Hill at [tara.hill@ed.gov](mailto:tara.hill@ed.gov). Learn more at [www.ed.gov/programs/dvpemergencyresponse/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/programs/dvpemergencyresponse/index.html).

### **Grants for the Integration of Schools and Mental Health Systems—84.215M**

Funds are available to increase student access to high-quality mental health care by developing innovative programs linking school systems with local mental health systems.

This program funds 20 grants, with an average award of \$250,000. Contact: Dana Carr at [dana.carr@ed.gov](mailto:dana.carr@ed.gov). Learn more at [www.ed.gov/programs/mentalhealth/index.html](http://www.ed.gov/programs/mentalhealth/index.html).

For more information regarding these and other discretionary grant competitions, visit the Department of Education *Grants and Contracts* page online at [www.ed.gov/fund](http://www.ed.gov/fund). Here you will find other funding opportunities as well, application procedures, and answers to common questions.

## Post-traumatic Stress Disorder: Katrina's Effects Linger

The immediate dangers and trauma are over, but damage from Hurricane Katrina lingers beyond the ruined neighborhoods in Gulf Coast cities. While most residents have recovered somewhat—with new places to live, new jobs or schools, and new clothes—many of them will continue to feel the trauma for months or years.

Research on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) shows that children who have witnessed traumatic events, such as violence or disaster, are vulnerable to long-term problems. Common reactions are fear, depression, anger, and distrust.

According to *Helping Children and Adolescents Cope With Violence and Disasters*

from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), children's reactions vary according to age.

### **5 Years Old and Younger**

Typical reactions include a fear of being separated from parents, crying, screaming, and clinging. Children may also show regressive behaviors such as bed-wetting or fear of the dark. Children in this age

# Comments

Questions? Comments? Suggestions? *The Challenge* is launching a new feature to include questions and comments from readers, and we need your feedback. Please send letters to editor Susan Lineberry by mail, fax, or e-mail. Or visit *The Challenge* Web site to submit comments or ideas. Please include your name and city for publication, and contact information if you want a reply.

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## Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (continued)

group are particularly affected by the ways their parents react to the traumatic event.

### 6 to 11 Years Old

Typical reactions include disruptive behavior, withdrawal, anger, irritability, and nightmares. They may feel depressed, anxious, or guilty, and they may complain of stomach or other aches.

### 12 to 17 Years Old

Typical reactions are similar to those of adults, including flashbacks, nightmares, depression, substance abuse, or emotional numbing. They may become withdrawn and isolated, avoid school, consider suicide, and lose sleep. Adolescents may feel extreme guilt or fantasize about revenge.

Scientists do not know why some children suffer more, but adult support can be a great help during times of disaster. Teachers and school officials can be a steadying influence for traumatized children.

Some things you as an educator can do are:

- If you were involved in the event, give yourself time to react and prepare to talk about it with children.
- Give students the time and the opportunity to talk about what happened. But don't force a child who doesn't want to talk.
- Offer art and play therapy for the youngest students.
- Be sensitive to cultural differences. Some cultures don't allow expression of negative emotions.
- Talk about coping and problem-solving skills. Encourage children to use age-appropriate measures to control anxiety.
- Invite parents to meetings so you can talk about the event, how children are coping, and what everyone can do to help.

Students who do not recover within a reasonable time may be suffering from symptoms of PTSD. According to NIMH, the

condition is diagnosed when the following symptoms persist for more than one month:

- Reexperiencing the event either in play, nightmares, or distress over events similar to the trauma.
- Routine avoidance of reminders of the event or general unresponsive attitude.
- Increased sleep disturbance, irritability, poor concentration, easily startled, and regressive behavior.

A mental health professional experienced with child and adolescent trauma is the best resource for a child suffering prolonged anxiety.

To learn more about PTSD and to locate resources, visit [www.medlineplus.gov](http://www.medlineplus.gov). The site discusses hundreds of health topics and treatment options, along with a medical dictionary and directories to find local practitioners. ■

Visit [MedlinePlus at www.medlineplus.gov](http://www.medlineplus.gov) for more on PTSD. MedlinePlus offers the latest in health news and resources. It is sponsored by the U.S. National Library of Medicine and the National Institutes of Health.

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# Resources

## Indicators of School Crime and Safety: 2005

November 2005, NCES 2006001

National Center for Education Statistics,

U.S. Department of Education and Bureau of Justice Statistics,

U.S. Department of Justice

This annual report presents the most recent data on school crime and safety. The indicators, based on multiple independent sources, include violent death, nonfatal student and teacher victimization, and reported discipline problems.

Available free online at

[www.nces.ed.gov/pubs2006/2006001.pdf](http://www.nces.ed.gov/pubs2006/2006001.pdf)

or call ED Pubs at (877) 433-7827.

## Tips for Helping Students Recovering From Traumatic Events

September 2005

U.S. Department of Education

This brochure provides practical information for students, parents, and teachers recovering from the Gulf Coast hurricanes.

Available free online at

[www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/recovering/recovering.pdf](http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/recovering/recovering.pdf) or

call ED Pubs at (877) 433-7827.

## Youth Indicators, 2005: Trends in the Well-Being of American Youth

July 2005, NCES 2005050

National Center for Education Statistics,

U.S. Department of Education

This report presents data on a broad range of youths' activities and conditions. Indicators are examined according to: 1) demographics; 2) school-related characteristics; 3) employment-related characteristics; 4) activities outside of school and work; and 5) health.

Available free online at

[www.nces.ed.gov/pubs2005/2005050.pdf](http://www.nces.ed.gov/pubs2005/2005050.pdf)

or call ED Pubs at (877) 433-7827.

## Are You Ready? An In-depth Guide to Citizen Preparedness

August 2004

Federal Emergency Management Agency

This guide provides comprehensive, step-by-step instructions for disaster preparedness. It describes such topics as communications, supplies, evacuation, and shelters.

Available free online at [www.fema.gov/pdf/areyouready/](http://www.fema.gov/pdf/areyouready/)

[areyouready\\_full.pdf](http://www.fema.gov/pdf/areyouready/areyouready_full.pdf) or call FEMA's publications warehouse at (800) 480-2520.