

Dear parents,

I imagine you have had some time to speak with your children about what happened on Friday. We learned a lot from the experience and I hope you were able to talk to your child about family emergency plans and safe ways to ensure rapid reconnection in crisis situations.

I also hope you had time to speak with your children about their emotions, fear and distress the whole community felt during and after the earthquake.

Children react differently to such disasters depending on their age, developmental level, and prior experiences. Some may respond by withdrawing, while others may have outbursts of anger or sadness. Please do not be alarmed by these reactions. They are perfectly normal responses to an extremely adverse event. The following are typical reactions children might exhibit following any natural disaster according to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network:

- Fear of separation from family members
- Worry that another earthquake will occur
- Clinging to parents, siblings, or teachers
- Worry about their safety or the safety of others
- Increase in activity level
- Decrease in concentration and attention
- Withdrawal from others
- Angry outbursts or tantrums
- Aggression to parents, siblings, or friends
- Increase in physical complaints, such as headaches and stomachaches
- Decline in school performance
- Long-lasting focus on the earthquake, such as talking repeatedly about it or re-enacting the event in play or drawing
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Changes in appetite
- Lack of interest in usual activities, even playing with friends
- Regressive behaviors, such as baby-talk, bedwetting, thumb-sucking, or throwing Tantrums

Please spend time talking to your children, letting them know that it is okay to ask questions and to share their worries. Establish an environment in which your children can freely ask questions and have some sort of closure about their thoughts on a daily basis.

Here are some guidelines for parents in working with children that have experienced a natural disaster provided by the National Child Traumatic Stress Network:

- Be a role model. Try to remain calm, so your child can learn from you how to handle stressful situations. Avoid clinging to your child to reduce your own fears. You may share some worries, but also share that you have hope or have a plan to help solve your concerns.
- Monitor adult conversations. Be aware of what adults are saying about the earthquake or the resulting damage. Children may misinterpret what they hear and be unnecessarily frightened.
- Limit media exposure. Protect your child from graphic images of the attack, including those on television, on the internet, and in the newspaper.
- Reassure children they are safe. You may need to repeat this frequently in the days and weeks after the earthquake. Spend extra time with them, playing games outside, reading together indoors, or just cuddling. Be sure to tell them you love them.
- Periodically, provide opportunities for children to talk about the earthquake if they want to. When they start talking about their fears, listen attentively. Assure them the danger is over (if it is) and/or that you are working hard to keep the family safe.
- Calm worries about their friends' safety. Even though phones may not be working, reassure your children that their friends' parents are taking care of them, just the way they are being taken care of by you.
- Tell children about community recovery. Reassure them that things are being done to restore electricity, phones, water, and gas. Tell them that the town or city will be removing debris and helping families find housing.
- Replace damaged toys as soon as you are able.

- Take care of your children's health. Help them get enough rest, exercise, healthy food, and water. Be sure they have a balance of quiet times and physical activities.
- Refrain from criticizing children for changes in their behavior, such as clinging to parents, re-enacting the earthquake, or frequently seeking reassurance.
- Maintain regular daily life. Even in the midst of disruption and change, children feel more secure with structure and routine. As much as possible, keep to regular mealtimes and bedtimes.
- Maintain expectations. Stick to your family rules about good behavior and respect for others. Continue family chores, but keep in mind that children may need more reminding than usual.
- Encourage children to help. Children cope better and recover sooner if they feel they are helping out. Give them small clean-up tasks or other ways to contribute. Afterward, provide activities that are not related to the earthquake, such as playing cards or reading.
- Be extra patient once children have returned to school. They may be more distracted and need extra help with homework for a while.
- Give support at bedtime. Children may be more anxious at times of separation from parents. Spend a little more time talking, cuddling, or reading than usual. (You will want to start the bedtime routine earlier so children get the sleep they need.) If younger children need to sleep with you, let them know it is a temporary plan, and that soon they will go back to sleeping in their own beds.
- Help with boredom. Daily activities, such as watching television, playing on the computer, and having friends over, may have been disrupted. Extracurricular activities, like sports and or dance classes, may have been suspended. Help children think of alternative activities to do, such as board games, card games, and arts and crafts.
- Keep things hopeful. Even in the most difficult situation, it is important to remain optimistic about the future. Your positive outlook will help your children be able to see good things in the world around them. This will help get them through even the most challenging times.

We at CAJ are doing everything in our power to restore normality and a safe learning environment for your children. We will be praying that these few days at home will be productive and a therapeutic experience for both you and your children.

Please feel free to email me with any questions or concerns you may have.

Ushio Sawada
Guidance Coordinator
Christian Academy in Japan