

Trauma and crisis counseling for children affected by disasters



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Introduction

In the last decade, there has been a significant increase in natural disasters. In 2018, the deadliest and most destructive wildfire known as Camp Fire resulted in 81 deaths, while 13, 503 residences and 514 businesses were destroyed in Northern California. In 2017, more than 14, 000 residents were forced to evacuate their homes in San Jose, California due to the rise of floodwater following one of the strongest storms San Jose had in years. Flood victims evacuated and turned to a local high school for temporary shelter. “ The evacuation order and advisory came after a full day of crews dealing with flood emergencies in the South Bay left some neighborhoods completely underwater as fire crews helped evacuate hundreds of residents by boat (CBS San Francisco and Bay City News Services, 2017).”

Children exposed to these natural disasters or others similar to them can result in various traumatic experiences such as psychological crisis. “ Psychological crisis comes about when a traumatic event overloads a person’s capacity to cope in his or her usual fashion. Psychological crises cannot reliably be predicted based on the events that precede them Benveniste, D (n. d) .” In Benveniste’s research, he discusses how mental health professionals can support and work with survivors from a wide range of major disasters by providing a brief description of stress disorders and early interventions.

To prevent or minimize trauma affected by natural disasters, school counselors can utilize a multi-tiered, multi-domain system of support to address the academic and behavioral needs of students. For example, a Tier

A Tier 1 program can be used as a preventive approach, resulting in all students having the knowledge to prepare for natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes, hurricanes, etc. Students, family members, school staff can all benefit from the curriculum by knowing how to stay prepared by stocking up on emergency supplies and establishing safe locations and meeting points for the students and their families.

A Tier 2 or Tier 3 approach at a school-based setting can be helpful for students dealing with the aftermath of natural disasters. “ Schools are frequently called upon in disaster recovery situations to provide mental and behavioral health services due to the natural fostering of supportive relationships through classmates, teacher, and school staff interaction (Hansel, T. C., Osofsky, H. J., Osofsky, J. D., & Speier, A. H. (2019).”

Literature Review

In literature reviews, there have been several school-based postdisaster interventions studied. The Katrina Inspired Disaster Screenings and Services (KIDSS) was implemented after Hurricane Katrina. KIDSS, the postdisaster intervention was created to provide a guideline to assist communities about trauma and understanding the needs and mental health services for children and adolescents. “ Researchers have noted that disaster focused interventions that target trauma symptoms have been found to be effective in reducing symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression (Hansel, T. C., Osofsky, H. J., Osofsky, J. D., & Speier, A. H. (2019).

Upon researching and studying how natural disasters are being addressed in schools, KIDSS’s study shared the wide-spread screening for reducing the <https://assignbuster.com/trauma-and-crisis-counseling-for-children-affected-by-disasters/>

trauma of students from Hurricane Katrina by using a toolkit process. This process involved 4 steps which are collaboration, screening, referral, and services. The collaboration step relies on efforts from the school. School personnel are seen as the expert for disaster recovery, however, it is important for all staff members to work together to reduce stress and disseminating psychoeducation information for students and their families. Once collaboration effort is set, screening takes place. The screening process helps the school understand the current needs of its student population. By allowing school staff to follow up with students, the school has a better understanding of what community resources and outside agencies to refer to. Next, students are then referred to mental health professions depending on their screening scores. Students with a higher symptom score are provided with intensive services under parental consent. Services is dependent on funding, post-disaster services, and availability of professionals. It is important for shared students to see a licensed professional with trauma-informed training following these events. As a result, the KIDDS intervention helped decrease trauma symptoms for students, however, the limitation of this research was limited only to the youth victims of Hurricane Katrina and not other natural disasters.

Other literature reviews reveal a principal role is vital when a natural disaster occurs because they are seen as community leaders. “ The role of a school leader includes listening, seeking, and understanding and leading the combined actions and initiatives of a variety of people. One critical part of leading a school is working in alignment with the wider school community (Fletcher, J., & Nicholas, K. (n. d.).” A school principal can support students

and teachers at their schools who display signs of post-traumatic stress. This literature review interviewed school principals and how they supported their community following a natural disaster. Immediately after the 2011 earthquake in Christchurch, one school closed down for three weeks. The principal quoted, “ *February was devastating because the school had to close for three weeks and had to be checked out just to make sure it was a safe environment for the kids to come back. There was a lot of stresses on staff, lots of stresses on the community and lots of stresses on the kids obviously. Our role took a big hit ... after February.* (Fletcher, J., & Nicholas, K. (n. d.) .” Family members were forced to leave on a short term or permanent status resulting in the class size to be reduced. With all the sudden changes, the school made it a priority to normal and create a sense of belonging to help the community heal and students feeling hopeful.

Another literature shared school counselors find themselves having both roles to support students and other survivors affected in natural disasters. “ School counselors face challenges in providing mental health interventions to children because of the difficulty in communicating with parents, both to gain consent for counseling and to include them in psychoeducational programs (Shepard, B., Kulig, J., & Pujadas Botey, A. 2017).” As a result, the counselors introduced whole-class interventions because they do not require consent and able to help students who are experiencing PTSD symptoms. To help re-establish school routines, the school did a school-wide activity fixing their school. “ *Children need to be assured that they are physically safe, and finding ways to in the rebuilding of the community can send this strong message. Fixing up the schoolyard by planting flowers and trees is just one*

way in which children can feel that life is moving on. Providing a safe place to talk about what they went through to express their fears, and to be reassured directly through supportive response by adults can provide emotional safety (Shepard, B., Kulig, J., & Pujadas Botey, A. 2017) .” In the aftermath of natural disasters, schools are seen as a sanctuary and safe haven for children and their families.

Description of Program

To prevent trauma effects from natural disasters on students (12-18 years old), the program and delivery method below will avert students from self-destructive behavior, substance abuse, or anxiety when an evacuation is called due to flooding. The curriculum will deliver a school-wide lesson on flood safety. The goal of the lesson is to prepare students and their families are ready if a flood watch, warning, or evacuation is ordered. Furthermore, students will understand how to find information or shelter after a flood disaster and be able to produce a preparedness plan tailored to their own needs.

This lesson plan will start with guiding questions and discuss why it is important to have a safety plan. Example of questions is, *“ In what ways might people prepare for a natural disaster? Why is it important to prepare for a natural disaster? Have you discussed with your family what you might do in the event of a natural disaster? If so, what plans did your family make? How will these plans help you in the event of a natural disaster.”* After the discussion and providing feedback, students will work on a worksheet that asks what essential items should they have in survival kit, emergency

contacts, and a list of safe spaces to meet in case of separations. At the end of the lesson, students will be given an opportunity to build survival kits for natural disasters and be able to take them home to their families.

Effectiveness of the Flood Safety Program

To measure the effectiveness of this program, students will be given a pre and post survey as well as a grading rubric. The purpose of the grading rubric is to keep students accountable and to help them start a conversation with their families about preparing for natural disasters. By allowing an extra credit option for having students get a signature talking to parents, families will be informed about what their child gained and how to apply their acquired skills in the event of a natural disaster. A quantitative measure is to give students a survey on what type of essential items they need following the lesson plan. Students are expected to list out the items and whether they have possession. Other approaches are listing out contact information and meet up locations. For qualitative measure, staff members can use the pre and post survey to see attitude and perception in natural disaster readiness. In the pre-survey, questions will be asked about certain scenarios and how the student will respond. A Likert scale will be utilized to test readiness level as well. In the post-survey, the questions will ask the same scenarios to see if any changes are made and determine if the attitude of emergency readiness changed. Limitations of this program are resources available at each home, instruction time, and staff delivery and knowledge of the curriculum.

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