

Talking To Your Child About The News

The images of the devastating earthquake in Haiti are on TV 24 hours a day and pictures of the disturbing scene are published on the internet and in newspapers for all to see.

News about natural disasters, like the one in Haiti, can be confusing to children, and make them worry about something similar happening close to home.

“Children do not have the resources grown ups do to understand the geographical sense of a situation like that in Haiti,’ says [Rochelle Harris, PhD, clinical psychologist](#) with Children’s Mercy Hospitals and Clinics. “A young child may not understand that an event like this, miles and miles away, can’t happen in their backyard.”

Dr. Harris says parents should be calm and answer their child’s questions about a natural disaster. She encourages parents to let their children talk openly about what scares them.

“Depending on the child’s maturity level, they have a limited understanding of the difference between risk and possibility,” Dr. Harris says. “So a child watching or listening to a news story can think, ‘can this happen to me?’ A child may not fully understand that an earthquake is factually possible and real, but simply unlikely in their neck of the woods.”

Dr. Harris recommends parents monitor their child’s TV news habits, and the content of what they see and hear.

“Parents need to intervene,” Dr. Harris says. “Children should not be watching the replay of images on the news, or looking at the images in the paper over and over again. This can be very traumatizing.”

Older children may be curious about how to help people involved in a natural disaster.

“It’s our basic human instinct to help others,” Dr. Harris says. “Parents should help their child foster that empathy and caring, and look for ways to join efforts to give back to that community.”

What Kids Can Do For Haiti January 2010

- I. Make [care kits](#) to send to relief organizations like Heart to Heart International.
- II. With the permission of an adult, go online to donate money to existing organizations, already established in Haiti such as:
 - [Clinton Bush Haiti Fund](#)
 - [Heart to Heart International](#)

- [Red Cross' Haiti Relief and Development Fund](#)
- [Salvation Army](#)
- [Yéle Haiti](#)
- With the permission of an adult, text to donate to existing organizations, already established in Haiti:
- Text **YELE** to **501501** to donate \$5 to Yéle Haiti, charged to your cell phone bill
- Text **HAITI** to **52000** to donate \$10 to the Red Cross, charged to your cell phone bill
- Text **QUAKE** to **20222** to donate \$10 to the Clinton Bush Haiti Fund, charged to your cell phone bill

III. Organize volunteers to assemble care kits and other needed supplies.

IV. Organize a fundraiser or donation drive.

- Identify a charity to send your donations to, and determine what items are most needed by the charity that you can help collect.
- Choose your fundraising event: care kit supply/donation drive, car wash, concert, party, play, bake sale (keep in mind the different costs of each type of event).
- Find people to help plan and run the fundraiser. Recruit friends and classmates with similar interests and a desire to help make a difference!
- Determine what is needed to hold your fundraiser. Try first to get whatever you need donated, and then determine what else is needed and the costs.
- If you choose to do a performance about Haiti, research the issues and the current situation, and incorporate it into your script or performance. Don't forget costumes and props to support telling your story.
- Give yourself enough time to practice.
- Find a place for the performance or play. Consider a school auditorium or gymnasium, local theater, church or community center.
- Promote your performance or fundraiser with flyers, emails and letters and through word-of-mouth.
- Hold your event. Be sure to tell everyone your fundraising goal and what the funds will be used for.

- Consider hosting a discussion about the current situation in Haiti after your performance to help build awareness and support in your community.
- The money you raise, minus the costs of the event, should be equal to (or greater than!) your fundraising goal.
- Send the money or items collected to your selected charity.
- Remember to set aside time to review the results of your efforts to judge its success, and learn from your experience.

Adapted from the Voices of Youth Web pages at Unicef.org