The death and destruction that accompany disaster events warrant special attention to communicating with children and adolescents. It is difficult to predict the kinds of psychological problems that children and adolescents will have; however, the following steps may help minimize later difficulties:

- Engage your students in conversations of their choosing—not necessarily about their feelings or the scene. Talking about the normal events of life is central to health.
- Remind students they are safe. Issues of physical safety and security take priority.
- Explain to children that these are actually rare and unlikely events. Tell them that there are warning systems in place.
- Everyone has a different way of responding to trauma.
- Allow children to respond their own way and listen to their stories.
- Maintain daily routines to the extent possible; avoid starting new ones. Stability can be reassuring.
- Your response to the disaster will affect your students’ response. Discuss your own reactions with other adults before talking with your students.
- Be alert to students expressing overwhelming feelings in discussions. Limiting time spent talking about the event can help your students express what they wish and not more than they might wish they had.
- Some children may respond by being distracted or having trouble remembering things. These should be tolerated and understood.
- Be alert to changes in students’ usual behavior (e.g., drop in grades, loss of interest, not doing homework, increased sleepiness or distraction, isolating themselves, and weight loss or gain).
- Increase your students’ sense of control and mastery.
- Encourage students to be active participants in disaster and emergency planning.

**For Younger Children:**

- Discuss the event in an open honest manner with kids.

**For Older Students:**

- Older children and adolescents may feel “stirred up.” Helping them understand their behavior and setting limits can help.
- Acknowledge the importance of peers in helping to reestablish normalcy.
- For many teens, their cognitive abilities are often greater than their emotional capacity to manage highly stressful situations. Expect emotional swings.
- Remember the importance of providing emotional support by “naming” the expectable reactions of sadness, numbness, anger, fear, and confusion. Explain how seemingly inappropriate giddiness, laughter, or callousness often are used to help ourselves from becoming overwhelmed.