Tips for Talking to Children & Youth About the Oil Spill Disaster in Mobile County

Ways to Help at Home for Preschoolers to Adolescents

Remember that in order to help your child, it is important that you take care of yourself. Make sure that you are taking the time to deal with your own stress and reactions to this disaster. You do not have to "fix" how your child feels. Try to help your child understand and cope with the disruption of life in Mobile County. Despite improvement of beaches and departure of cleanup crews, healing takes time for most children. Some children may need professional help. If signs of stress do not subside, or if they get worse, consider consulting a mental health professional trained in working with children. You can receive free services by calling 1-800-639-REBOUND.

The stress and impact of the oil spill can be as hard on children as adults. Some children may be affected without anyone knowing. Without meaning to, parents may make a child feel that it is not all right to talk about the experience. This may cause confusion, self-doubt and feelings of helplessness in a child. A child needs to hear that many feelings are normal during and after an event. Knowing this helps a child cope with the experience.

Children and youth may show signs of stress due to the losses and changes caused by the oil spill in the Gulf Coast or worry about parents losing their jobs. Children may be distressed by the image of oil and large numbers of workers cleaning beaches from Fort Morgan to Perdido Pass. Children may lose friends whose families must move for economic reasons. Signs may include sadness, tantrums, aggressive or withdrawn behavior, and a return to outgrown behavior. Signs may also include stomach aches and headaches, and an ongoing desire to stay home from school or away from friends. These signs are normal and usually do not last long. You can help your child with the following suggestions.

Preschooler

Stick to regular family routines

Make an extra effort to provide comfort and support

Avoid separation when possible

Allow your child to sleep in the parents' room for a limited time

Encourage your child to express feelings through play, drawing, puppet shows and storytelling

Limit watching television shows about the spill

Elementary Age Children

Provide extra attention

Set gentle but firm limits for acting out behavior

Always listen to your child's telling of the experience

Encourage your child to express feelings through talk and play

Provide chores and activities that are structured, but not too demanding

Explain how people are helping to respond to the oil spill and how communities are impacted by this disaster

Preadolescents and Adolescents

Provide extra attention

Be there to listen to your child, but do not force talk about feelings

Encourage discussion of experiences among peers

Urge your child to take part in physical activities

Support the return to regular activities when possible

Promote healthy caring and exercise habits

Limit exposure to disturbing television shows

Keep conversations about the claims process private

Project Rebound is a collaborative effort of state and local agencies to provide comprehensive behavioral health response to residents of Baldwin and Mobile counties who were impacted by the oil spill. Services include outreach, counseling, referral, public education, and resiliency building.

PROJECT REBOUND

1-800-639-REBOUND

Deaf or Hard of Hearing?

Please use the statewide relay system to contact Project Rebound: **711**

find us on the web @ www.mh.alabama.gov/projectrebound