



**Judge Glenda Hatchett** is the mother of two boys and the best-selling author of *Say What You Mean and Mean What You Say: 7 Simple Strategies To Help Our Children Along the Path to Purpose and Possibility* (Harper Collins). She is also the host of the syndicated courtroom series *Judge Hatchett* (check local listings for station and time).

# JUDGE HATCHETT

Dealing with Children  
who have  
Experienced Tragedy

“As a mother of two wonderful sons, I've learned of several things parents and other adults can do to provide this support to young people. Outlined here are several tips to help alleviate the emotional trauma on our children and teens, and to strengthen our own resolve to be positive role models in this time of great need.”

– Judge Glenda Hatchett



**OTHER RESOURCES:**

Red Cross  
[www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org)

Salvation Army  
[www.salvationarmyusa.org](http://www.salvationarmyusa.org)

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)  
[www.fema.gov/](http://www.fema.gov/)

National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)  
[www.ncptsd.va.gov/pfa/PFA.html](http://www.ncptsd.va.gov/pfa/PFA.html)

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS)  
[www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cmhs/EmergencyServices/after.asp](http://www.mentalhealth.samhsa.gov/cmhs/EmergencyServices/after.asp)

National Mental Health Association  
[www.nmha.org/children/index.cfm](http://www.nmha.org/children/index.cfm)

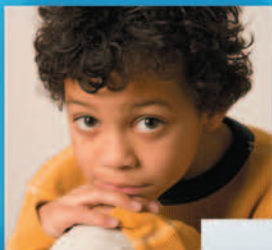
National Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) Association  
[www.nationalcasa.org/](http://www.nationalcasa.org/)

[www.judgehatchett.com](http://www.judgehatchett.com)



# Fear & Uncertainty

happens to all of us when disaster strikes. It is especially acute for our children and teens. Many children are able to cope effectively with the emotional strain of a natural disaster when they are empowered with an effective support system.



## For Children

### GIVE TIME

During the aftermath of a crisis, make the extra effort to carve time in the busy day to simply connect. Focus on an interaction that does not take place concurrent with anything else, such as cooking or driving the car. Instead, take the time to zone in on children for as little as 15 minutes. This dedicated time will serve as a progress report to gauge your child's reactions about the disaster.

### JUST PLAY

It is easy to fall into our own depression and concern when a disaster happens. However, as much as possible, attempt to elevate your home environment for the sake of the children. Playtime can relieve a child's stress and fears. A play activity also encourages younger kids to share their feelings through non-verbal experiences such as drawing.

### STAY ON SCHEDULE

To help restore a sense of normalcy and safety, stay on a regular schedule for family and household activities. Even if your family has been relocated to a shelter or other temporary housing, attempt to establish a routine. From eating at a certain hour to going to bed at the same time, a schedule will help build emotional stability.

### HELP OTHERS

An essential element toward empowerment is the ability to help others. Teach your young ones that they are not too young to make a difference by providing opportunities to assist others. Places of worship, schools and community centers are good resources for this type of activity.

### MONITOR THE MEDIA

In an effort to regain balance and a sense of well-being, limit the number of times children see the disaster in the media. Multiple viewings of a specific tragic or catastrophic event can actually traumatize children.

### STAY CLOSE

Following these types of events, children may become more afraid of going to sleep, staying alone or being separated from their parents. If you leave, reassure your children that you will return. Give them a realistic time-frame in words that they understand, and be back on time.

## For Teens

### TALK TIME

Simply put, we all need to talk to our teens as much as possible, even when it seems they don't want to participate. With this age group, it is important to answer all questions honestly, but with reassurance. It is also helpful to inquire about your teen's opinion and listen to their answers.

### EXPECT SWINGS

While it is sometimes challenging to do so, we must realize that teenagers may experience extreme highs and lows in times of crisis due to the natural, fluctuating hormonal levels in the body. The uncertainty of a disaster can make these shifts seem more apparent. Take a position of understanding when a teen responds to stress with angry behavior or bravado during tense times.

### ENGAGE YOUR TEEN

A wonderful way to empower your teen in times of uncertainty is to engage them in your plans. Whether it be planning the family's new living situation or preparing a survival kit, make sure your teen knows how his/her actions contribute to the entire family's well-being. If your teen has a role to play, feelings of confidence will abound.

### GET CREATIVE

If your teen is unusually withdrawn, the pressure of what is going on in the world may be taking hold. Encourage some form of self-expression, whether it is through music or by writing thoughts down on paper. Creativity can help a teen feel more in control.

### BE HONEST

Don't be afraid to say, "I don't know." Part of keeping discussions open and honest is releasing the need to have all the answers. It will be helpful for your teen to understand that they are not alone in their feelings of uncertainty and that disasters cause troublesome feelings even in adults.

### GET PROFESSIONAL HELP

Don't do it all yourself. Talk with a medical professional or clergy member. If your child continues to struggle, seek professional counseling and find a certified psychologist or psychiatrist in your community.