

Ask Miriam...

Individuals and families in the community are faced with challenging issues and concerns regarding their social, emotional and psychological health. Through the cooperation of **The Jewish World**, Jewish Family Services will offer responses.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, readers have many concerns and issues.

I've two letters that I will answer together.

Q. Dear Miriam,

With all of the coverage of the recent hurricane, it is difficult to prevent our children from hearing details about the tragedy. They have been asking a lot of questions about what happened and wondering if it could happen to us.

We want to allay their fears, but at the same time we also worry that a disaster could strike here. Between concerns about terrorism, bridges collapsing, storms, etc., we would be foolish to think we are immune from danger.

How do we help our children feel more comfortable?

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Q. Dear Miriam,

Our family has been following the hurricane news with regularity. As the reports and video of looting have appeared, our family has been discussing what is right or wrong to do when people are in danger. Our children are teenagers and the discussion around this issue is coming at a very important stage in their development.

Can you give us some guidance about how to handle the issue?

A. Dear Families,

The impact of Hurricane Katrina has been great both physically and emotionally.

It is not in another country and many local families have ties to the stricken area.

Children beyond the age of 6-7 are generally aware of what is happening. Trying to protect children from being exposed to anything about the hurricane is impossible and only creates more mystery and fear. Sit down with younger children and let them ask questions. Answer honestly even if it means you can't guarantee what will happen in a given situation.

Develop a family plan for evacuating your home in an emergency, and maintain an emergency supply of food, water, batteries, etc. Since water related disasters are particularly frightening, you need to assure them that type of emergency is not likely to happen here.

Just letting your children know that you have a plan can make them feel safer.

Fears that are expressed can be addressed, so encourage your children to share them.

In response to the second letter, this issue is very appropriately addressed in the Jewish faith.

We are taught that we can not judge how others are responding if we have not experienced the same event.

We learn that it is permissible to use extreme measures to save a life. Did the looting save lives?

Your family may never agree on the "right or wrong" behavior, but the discussion will be important in helping your children to understand how to make difficult decisions.

I would also suggest you speak with your rabbi to develop some meaningful teaching about the value dilemmas presented by the hurricane and other emergencies.

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Miriam Adler, A.C.S.W., C.S.W., is assistant director of J.F.S. She answers most frequently asked questions. Please send questions to "Ask Miriam," c/o Jewish Family Services of NENY, 877 Madison Ave., Albany, NY 12208 or e-mail madler@jfsneny.org or call 518-482-8856.