

# **JESUS**

## **SOMEONE WHO CARES**

**Mentor's Guide for Victims of Natural Disasters**



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## **Introduction:**

Natural disasters (i.e., hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, floods) are very difficult and frightening for children and adults alike. Due to the unpredictable nature of this type of disaster, children do not have time to prepare themselves emotionally for the event. Their view that the world is safe and predictable is challenged. They also fear that the event will happen again. The damage, injuries and deaths that occur following such an event are difficult for children to understand.

Children experience several losses following a natural disaster. Loss or separation from family, home, personal belongings or pets rob a child's sense of security and control. The stress caused by threat of danger and multiple losses hinders their ability to process the event and leaves them feeling overwhelmed, unprotected and powerless.

In difficult times, children look to their parents for security and comfort. But following a natural disaster, parents or caregivers may be physically or emotionally unavailable to provide comfort and care. Parents and caregivers also have a tendency to focus on the physical needs and safety of a child without taking care of the emotional needs as well.

This is why your role is so important. These children need someone to care, someone who will listen, and someone who will walk with them toward healing and hope. You are that person. You may wonder if you are qualified or able to mentor children. Be assured that this manual will give you helpful information and very clear instructions for you to use as you meet with the children. Thank you for committing to make a difference in the lives of children.

## **“Jesus, Someone Who Cares” Book Overview:**

The “Seekers”, a group of multi-ethnic children, are giving a report on Christianity at the annual Seeker Convention. Using stories of personal crisis or trauma, accompanied with stories from the Bible, they present the Christ of Christianity as someone who cares for us and desires to have a relationship with us. They share that Jesus cares about their needs, fears, loss, hurts, feelings and their future. The story contains a clear, child-friendly presentation of the gospel and the eternal hope that only Jesus can give. The story ends with a clear explanation of how to receive Christ and live for Him.

You need to read the book first so that you are familiar with the story and how this mentor's guide can be used with it. Then, you will go through the book with the children. Older children may be able to read the book. Young children may need you to read the story to them. If you are reading the story, point to the speech bubbles as you read so they can follow along.

Since the characters in the book share stories of trauma, the children may need your support and comfort as they read it. If the children become upset while reading the story, take a break and encourage them to share their feelings. When they are ready, continue reading the story.

## **“Jesus, Someone Who Cares” Mentor’s Guide for Victims of Natural Disasters:**

Please be sure to read *“A Guide for Mentors”* before meeting with a child. It provides helpful information and resources for talking with children about traumatic events.

The mentor's guide for victims of natural disasters is a supplement to the “Jesus, Someone Who Cares” book. This guide will provide you with discussion questions and resources specifically for children who are victims of a natural disaster. As you read the “Jesus, Someone Who Cares” book with the children, this guide will help you apply specific content of the story to their area of emotional hurt.

## **Common Reactions of Children to Natural Disasters:**

Children will all react differently to a traumatic event. The level of their reaction depends upon their personality, previous traumatic experiences and how exposed they were to the event. For example, a child who witnesses the destruction caused by the strong wind and flooding may have a stronger reaction than a child who didn't. So a common rule is the greater the exposure to trauma the stronger and longer the reaction. Children of different ages will also react to the trauma in different ways.

A child may experience several, not necessarily all, of these common reactions:

- Trauma related fear – fear of it happening again, fear of going near the waves or water (if trauma was water related), fear for personal safety, fear of being separated from parents/care giver, fear of their feelings/reactions
- Nightmares and other sleep disturbances
- Irritability, anger, aggressive outbursts or destructive behavior
- Separation difficulties – clingy, dependent behaviors, desire to sleep with parents, and not wanting to go to school
- Disorganized or agitated behavior
- Age-inappropriate behaviors – acting younger than the age they are (thumb sucking, bedwetting, fear of strangers)
- Helplessness and vulnerability
- Changes of mood, personality and behaviors
- Loss of interest in activities
- Difficulty concentrating
- Depressed mood
- Loss of hope for the future
- Stomachaches, headaches, loss of appetite

Since children may not know why the disaster and related death and destruction happened, they will have a tendency to make up their own reasons. Their reasons may not be based on truth, but rather on their imagination. Young children may feel that they somehow caused the event to happen which will lead to feelings of guilt. For example, if a child was misbehaving when the disaster came, he may feel that this bad thing happened because he was acting badly.

These reactions should be considered normal child responses to traumatic events. Children should not be shamed or punished for demonstrating these normal behaviors. Rather, they need to know that it is okay to feel the way they do and that you would like to talk with them about their feelings. They also need to know that they won't always feel this way. Overtime, they will feel better as they play, draw, or talk about their feelings and experiences with you.

## **Guiding Children through the “Jesus, Someone Who Cares” Book:**

During troubling times, it is comforting to know that there is someone available who cares about us and desires to walk with us through our difficult moments. You will be one of those caring people the child needs. However, even the most caring, available mentor will not be able to be with each child every minute of each day. That is why it is important for you to introduce the child to Jesus and help them discover that Jesus cares about them and is always available to help them through their struggles in life. Jesus has promised to be with us always.

That is the most important truth the child needs to understand through this book – Jesus is someone who cares!

Shanti's story, which begins on page 10, will probably be the story that most relates to the child's experiences during the natural disaster. However, the presentation of the life of Christ in this book will provide additional discussions that may be helpful in bringing comfort and hope to the child reader.

The following questions can be used to create discussion with the child about what happened, his feelings, thoughts and reactions. The child may have never told anyone his story. These questions will cause him to think back to the day of the event which may lead to strong emotional reactions. The section titled "Emotional Reactions and Suggested Intervention" in the "Guide for Mentor's" will help you to deal with some possible emotional reactions. If a child does not want to answer a question or talk about what happened, don't force her to talk. Perhaps she would be more comfortable drawing a picture of her answer or feelings.

After you go through the story and the following discussion questions, talk with the child about the very last page titled "How About You?" The greatest help and hope you can give a child is a relationship with Jesus.

### **Discussion Questions from Shanti's Story (pages 10-11):**

1. Shanti was swept away in a terrible flood. How do you think Shanti felt during that time?
2. Peter and his friends were in a very dangerous storm out on the sea. How do you think Peter and his friends felt while in the storm?
3. How were Shanti's and Peter's experiences like your experience?
4. What would you say to Peter or Shanti to help them feel better?
5. What did people tell you that helped you feel better?
6. Where were you during the natural disaster? (*Note: substitute "natural disaster" with the name of the disaster – hurricane, tornado, flood, etc.*)
7. What happened where you were? What did you see?
8. What were your thoughts and feelings when it was happening?
9. What do you think about and feel today?
10. What did you do to help yourself during the natural disaster?
11. What are you doing now to help yourself?
12. Jesus reached down and lifted Peter out of the water and walk with him to the safety of the boat. In what ways can Jesus help you today?
13. What does Shanti do now when she feels afraid?
14. What can you do when you feel afraid?
15. What would you want to say to Jesus today?

## **Closing the Discussion:**

It is important that you end the discussion with encouragement and hope. Spend some time talking about the good things that are happening in their lives. Talk about ways that Jesus can help them. You want to leave them with hope, not hurt.

It is best to end your discussion time with prayer. Ask the child if there is anything you can pray with her about. In your prayer, include a prayer of comfort for the child, the assurance that Jesus loves her and will always be with her (in good times and bad), and that she can always trust in Him. If the child would like to receive Christ as her Lord and Savior, lead her in a prayer of salvation.

Tell her that you appreciate her sharing her story and feelings. Let her know that you will continue to pray for her and her family. Tell her that you are available if she needs to talk or would like prayer.

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