

HEALTHCARE

# How to talk to kids about Texas floods and other natural disasters

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July 7, 2025, 11:45 a.m. CT

The Fourth of July floods feels too close for many parents across Central Texas. Two 8-year-old Austin girls, Linnie McCown and Mary Stevens, were among the Camp Mystic campers swept away by the Guadalupe River early Friday morning — two of the more than 80 people who lost their lives in Kerr County.

In Travis County, eight people have died, two in Williamson and three in Burnet. Many more are still missing.

As a parent or guardian, what do you say to children about what happened last week?

## **First acknowledge your own feelings**

Coping with our feelings about this, we're really struggling, said Karin Price, the chief of psychology for Texas Children's Hospital. We want to hug our children tightly, and we should, but we also have to be a voice of reassurance.

The way you might talk to a fellow adult with anger and sorrow and blame is not the same way you should talk to children. They need to know that they are safe, Price said.

## **Make it age appropriate**

Think about your child's developmental age, Price said.

For preschoolers and younger, you are going to want to "shield them all together," Price said, because they won't understand what has happened and talking about it a lot could just be confusing to them.

For kids who are elementary school age and up, start with finding out what they know: "I think you've probably heard about the really terrible flooding. What have you heard about it?"

You want to find out what they know and think verses what you know, Price said. Especially with social media and news coverage, what they know might not be accurate.

## **Reassure them**

Remind kids that this is very rare and unlikely to happen again.

Let them know that no one is at fault because assigning blame isn't helpful.

Don't tell them that "this won't ever happen to you" because kids won't believe that, Price said.

Don't tell them things like "it could have been worse" or "you're so lucky this didn't happen to you."

Focus on the helpers to reassure kids. Let them know that many people are checking in on the people in the flooded area, and in weeks and months to come, people will work on how to prevent this in the future.

This also can be a good time to go over your family's evacuation plan. If you get separated, where will you meet? What will you bring with you? This gives kids a sense that you can keep them safe and that you have a plan.

## **Know that all feelings are OK**

Some kids might be very sad or might be scared, and some kids might not have thought about this at all.

"Kids are especially resilient," Price said, "and most will deal with this and be OK."

But if kids are having a lot of persistent fear or sadness, if their normal eating and sleeping patterns are disrupted, if they don't want to go outside or leave the house, those are all signs that more help is needed.

You can start with your pediatrician to get a referral. Texas Children's also has made appointments available both in-person in Austin and Houston and virtually. You can call 832-822-3181 to get an appointment.

## **How do you talk to kids who have been impacted by the loss of someone they know?**

"There is no way to sugarcoat how terrible this is," Price said. Listen to how kids are feeling.

For some kids, going to the funeral will be helpful; for others, it might not help. Let them take the lead in making that decision. Sometimes giving kids control over things like whether to attend or not, whether they can sit with their friends or with you, and giving them an out to leave if they are not comfortable, or to watch remotely instead of in person, can make them feel more in control of something they have no control of, Price said.

Also recognize that the days and weeks to come might be difficult even as people stop talking about the floods. As kids go back to school and their friend isn't there, more feelings might come up. Expect kids to go through different phases of trauma and grief.

## What should you say to kids who are headed to camp?

Again remind them that this was rare. And reaffirm that you believe they will be safe at camp. Affirm their feelings if they express fear: "I understand that it is really scary," but "we don't want to let fear make decisions for us."

Remind them of how much fun they have had or will have at camp.

## Become a helper

One way to give kids some control is to put fear into action. This also can be a lesson in resiliency: This thing happened and we came together and helped as a community.

Here are some of the ways you can help:

**Texas Children's Hospital:** Its North Austin location is collecting baby items such as diapers, wipes and formula; new blankets, toys, books and children's socks and underwear; bottled water, packaged drinks and nonperishable snacks and meals. It's also created a [Texas Children's Central Texas Hope Fund](#).

**Austin Pets Alive:** Raising money, collecting donations and organizing pet transports from Kerr County.

**The Central Texas Community Foundation** started a fund to assist those impacted by the devastating floods. Anyone wishing to donate can go to its [Wilco Cares - Support July 2025 Flood Victims](#).

**Kerr County Flood Relief Fund:** Established by the Community Foundation of the Texas Hill Country to support relief and recovery.

Donate [here](#).