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INFORMATION FROM YOUR PEDIATRICIAN

Dark rain clouds, lightning, high winds and thunder can be scary for many children

With better warning systems, it's easier to be prepared for severe storms in the summertime.

But if you notice that even the mention of a storm disrupts your child's normal activity, she could need extra help managing her feelings. Signs include:

- Being afraid to be away from a parent or caregiver.
- Trouble sleeping.
- Not wanting to leave the house.
- Physical aches and pains, such as a headache or stomachache.

Following are tips from the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) and emergency preparedness experts:

- Unless you are in danger, turn off the television. If you are watching news coverage after a severe storm, be aware of who else might be paying attention. Children can become fearful from viewing repeated images of destruction, according to the AAP.
- Parents should pay attention to how they react to news of a storm. If the parent seems afraid or upset, the child also may act this way. Even infants are sensitive to how their parents respond to severe weather and may have disrupted sleep patterns after a severe weather experience, notes the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Parents can respond with reassurance and cuddling.
- Invite your child to help you set up a home weather preparedness kit. Parents can find tips on what to include in the kit at www.fema.gov. Examples include flashlight, weather radio, water, blankets and supplies to keep a child busy (e.g., homework or coloring table).
- Anxious school-age children can be reminded that their school has a plan, and their teachers will take care of them in severe weather.
- Focus on the positive effects of storms. Families can watch from a safe location and talk about the rain helping flowers grow and watering the grass, or the cool, refreshing air.

Anxiety is common among children who are directly involved in or see severe storm destruction, have routines disrupted, know a friend or relative who was hurt or died in a storm, or lost their home. The AAP encourages parents to talk with their pediatrician for guidance.

Find more information about disaster preparedness at <http://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/Getting-Your-Family-Prepared-for-a-Disaster.aspx>.



— Trisha Koriath

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