

Appendix Q: FRC Child-Focused Resources for Staff

This section provides staff with child-focused tools and resources to support reunification operations.

Talking with and Supporting Children After a Crisis

(Adapted from the American Academy of Pediatrics – HealthyChildren.org: “Talking to Children About Tragedies and Other News Events”)

Core Principles

- Use calm, simple, reassuring language.
- Be honest but avoid unnecessary or graphic details.
- Give age-appropriate explanations and reassurance that they are safe.
- Let children ask questions and express feelings freely.
- Keep siblings together when possible.
- Model calm behavior. Children mirror adult tone and body language.

Where to Start

- Ask what they’ve heard. Most children already know something.
- Ask what questions they have. Listen first, then clarify.
- Correct misinformation gently and simply.
- Reassure: “You are safe here. We’re helping families find each other.”

Talking Points

- “It’s okay to feel sad, scared, or angry. Lots of people feel that way after something scary happens.”
- “Adults are working hard to help your family and keep you safe.”
- “If you have questions or worries, you can talk to me or another helper here.”

Young Children (Preschool–Elementary)

- Keep it short and simple (“There was a big storm, but you’re safe here.”).
- Avoid showing or discussing graphic details or media coverage.
- Offer comfort through calm voices, routines, and quiet activities.

Older Children and Teens

- Provide a little more information if they ask for it.
- Encourage honest questions and emotional expression.
- Reinforce that the event is not their fault.
- Offer healthy outlets like drawing, writing, or helping others.

Children with Developmental Delays or Disabilities

- Match explanations to developmental level, not age.
- Use visuals or familiar routines to support understanding.
- Respect individual comfort needs or sensory sensitivities.

Watch for Signs of Distress

- Trouble sleeping or frequent nightmares
- Physical complaints (headache, stomachache, fatigue)
- Regression or clinginess
- Withdrawal, irritability, sadness
- Appetite or behavior changes



Supporting Children with Autism and Developmental Delays at the FRC

Just-in-time guidance for staff to support children with autism and other developmental delays as they may experience heightened anxiety, sensory overload, and behavioral challenges during or after a disaster.

1. Immediate Actions

- **Ask for Familiarity:** If possible, check with known adults or older sibling about items the child prefers to hold or play with.
- **Provide Comfort Items:** Offer favorite toys (blocks, cars), soft blankets, or sensory items.
- **Maintain Routine:** Keep predictable schedules and familiar activities whenever possible.
- **Use Visual Supports:** Picture schedules or visual aids help communicate changes in routine or location.

2. Communication Tips

- **Speak Calmly and Clearly:** Use simple language, short sentences, and a reassuring tone. Match the child's communication level and height.
- **Avoid Overstimulation:** Reduce simultaneous talking, touching, and eye contact. Limit exposure to bright lights and loud noises.
- **Be Patient:** Allow extra time for processing and responding.
- **Remember Developmental Level:** A child's communication or problem-solving may not match their appearance. Adapt your approach accordingly.

3. Managing Tantrums or Meltdowns

- **Safety First:** Remove objects that could cause injury.
- **Ask for Guidance:** Check with familiar adults or siblings for strategies that usually help.
- **Provide Brief Reassurance:** Stay nearby but avoid excessive talking, touching, or showing frustration, which can escalate the situation.

4. Sensory Toolkit: Recommended Items

Category	Items
Sensory Management	Fidget toys, stress balls, spinners, textured toys, weighted blankets or vests, noise-canceling headphones, soft lighting, oral motor tools, light-up toys
Communication Aids	Visual schedules, PECS cards, social stories, communication boards
Supportive Items	Chargers, tablets with games and parental controls, soft dry clothing, diapers (child and adolescent sizes)

Safety Equipment	Soft mats/padding, door alarms/locks, safety gates, visual safety signs, first-aid kit
------------------	--

Tips for Use:

- Introduce one item at a time.
- Provide guidance and instruction.
- Supervise use, especially with small or chewable items.
- Offer choices, allow children to select items.
- Ensure all items are safe, non-toxic, and age appropriate.
- Be flexible; adjust the toolkit as the child's needs change.

5. Preparing the Family Reunification Center

Items to Prepare:

- Simple visual schedule for daily activities ([sample](#))
- Social stories ([sample](#) , [Resource Link 1](#), [Resource Link 2](#))
- Clear signage with picture cues for instructions

Space Setup:

- Designate a quiet, predictable area for retreat with low lighting and soft seating.
- Minimize excess toys and materials to reduce overstimulation.
- Post clear visual cues to guide movement through the center.
- Use gates to prevent elopement.
- Have a plan for managing challenging behaviors or meltdowns.

Waiting at the Center: A Visual Schedule

This visual schedule will show you what you can do at the center while you wait for your adult. Here are the steps:

1. Checking In:



2. Find a Cozy Spot



3. Read a Book



4. Draw a Picture



5. Play with Toys



6. Talk to a Friendly Staff Member



7. Adult Arrives!



We hope you enjoy your time at the center while you wait!



Staying at the Center Until a Known Adult Arrives

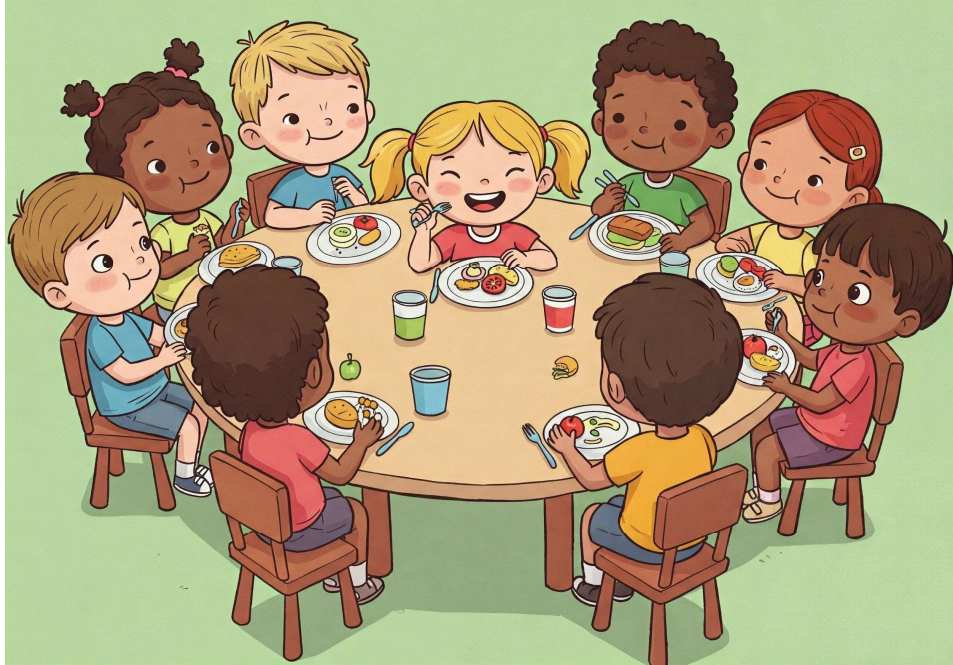
Sometimes, grown-ups have to go somewhere else. When this happens, you will stay at the center.

A known adult will pick you up. A known adult is someone you know and trust. They will come to get you.

You will stay at the center until then. There are fun things to do at the center!



You can take a nap if you are tired. There are soft beds and blankets.



You can eat yummy snacks and meals. The food is good!



You can play with toys. There are lots of toys to choose from!



You can read books. There are many stories to hear.



You can draw pictures. Use lots of colors!

There are friends to play with. You are not alone. The teachers are there to help. They will take care of you.

Remember, a known adult will pick you up. You will be safe at the center.