



NATIONAL CENTER  
FOR SCHOOL CRISIS  
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## Current gaps and opportunities in pediatric disaster science -- Behavioral Health Research

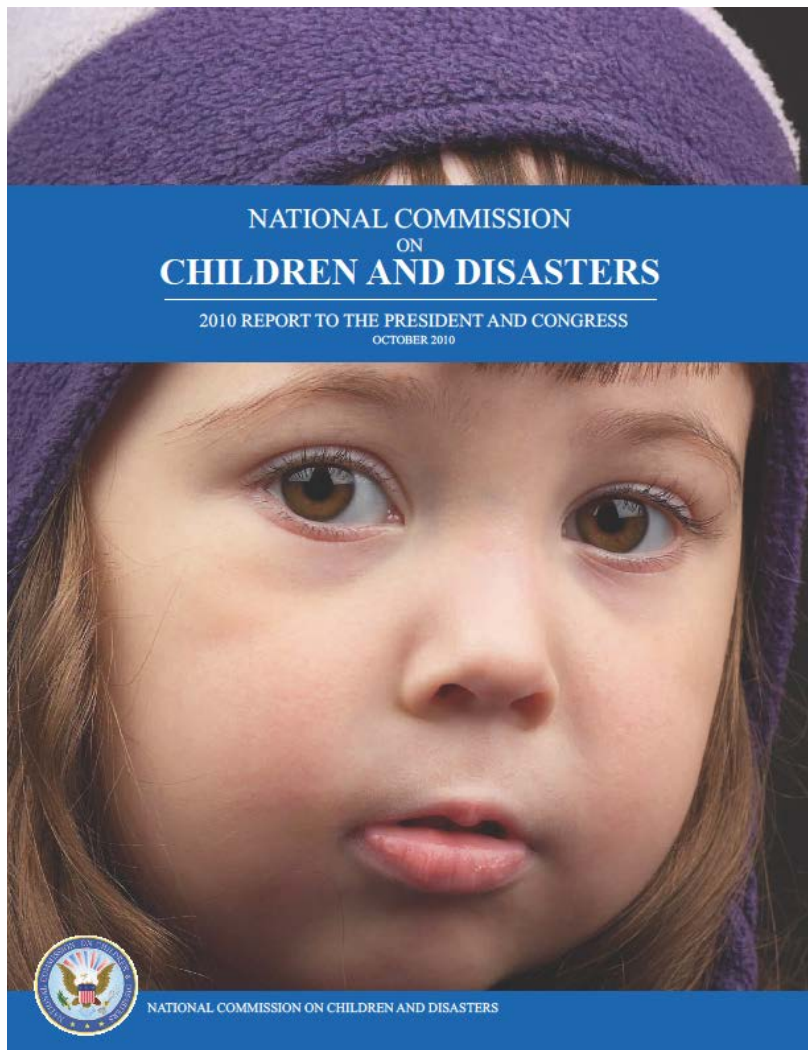


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National Commission on  
Children and Disasters



HHS should enhance the research agenda for children's disaster mental and behavioral health, including psychological first aid, cognitive-behavioral interventions, social support interventions, bereavement counseling and support, and programs intended to enhance children's resilience in the aftermath of a disaster

# Highlighted gaps in disaster behavioral health

- Research beyond prevalence of trauma and other mental health symptoms and impact of trauma approaches – include full spectrum of outcomes (e.g., bereavement, nonclinical distress, adjustment, coping and resilience) and interventions – Grolnick, Schonfeld et al., 2018
- Efficacy of population-level supportive services
- How to modify services for sub-populations from historically underserved and marginalized groups
- Interventions for caregivers of children after disaster





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Exercises, drills and other preventive interventions



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# Early intervention and prevention initiatives

- Children's stories, coloring books and parent guidance often quickly developed in immediate aftermath and widely disseminated without evidence base – and without attempt to collect evidence to guide future use
- Materials are developed and promoted for prevention efforts without evaluation for efficacy



# Exercises and drills (e.g., active shooter drills in schools)

- Occurring in almost all schools
- Lack evidence of efficacy – researchers have begun to question efficacy of some popular training approaches
- We must be cautious about potential unintended consequences
- Growing evidence of a significant potential of psychological risks and other unintended consequences, especially when children are deceived or high-intensity drills

# Some children report they want this training

- Some students feel empowered by exercises
- They may underestimate how others with different personalities, coping studies, personal histories of prior trauma or anxiety/stress, and other individual vulnerabilities may respond
- May feel comforted because it provides illusion of control – prevention efforts are only effective if they actually decrease risk of harm
- Such efforts could result in increased guilt if individual is not able to respond in idealized fashion in real event



# Additional considerations

- Unique needs of young children; children who suffered traumatic events/losses or pre-existing anxiety; those with physical, intellectual and NDD rarely considered in exercise planning
- We need research identifying children most likely to experience negative impacts and successful accommodations to mitigate additional burden on vulnerable children
- Must also consider needs of adults

# Summary recommendations

- Research is needed to evaluate the goals, efficacy, and potential unintended consequences of crisis preparedness activities involving children
- Strategies likely to cause significant distress or unintended consequences (e.g., high-intensity live exercises) should be evaluated carefully before implemented, especially in absence of evidence of efficacy