



YOUTH MENTAL WELLNESS
& PEER SUPPORT

CHAPTER 1

PREPAREDNESS

IS NOT JUST ABOUT SUPPLIES.

It is also about helping kids feel safe, included, supported, and less alone.

This section is one of the main reasons Ready Together exists. Natural disasters can interrupt school, routines, friendships, sports, and the feeling of normal life. Students can help each other, but no student should feel responsible for fixing someone else's pain.

In this section:

-  What kids and teens may need after a disaster
-  Why kids should feel included, not responsible
-  How peer support can help without becoming therapy
-  When to involve trusted adults or professional help
-  How comfort, routines, and normalcy support recovery



CORE IDEA:

Kids can listen, include, encourage, and connect friends to help. Kids should not diagnose, counsel, keep unsafe secrets, or carry recovery alone.

Why Mental Wellness Belongs in Disaster Prep

A plan can protect more than supplies and property.

When people talk about hurricane preparation, they usually mention water, batteries, gas, and evacuation zones. Those things matter. But for kids and teens, a disaster can also mean losing routine, missing school, being away from friends, or feeling like adults are making huge decisions around them.

That is why Ready Together treats emotional safety as part of preparedness.

When young people know the plan, understand their safe role, and have trusted adults and peers around them, a scary situation can feel a little less overwhelming.



KIDS4KIDS REMINDER:

Preparedness should create calm, connection, and confidence - not fear.

PHYSICAL PREPAREDNESS INCLUDES:

- ☒ Supplies and water
- ☒ Evacuation zones
- ☒ Alerts and routes
- ☒ Documents and insurance
- ☒ Medical and pet plans

EMOTIONAL PREPAREDNESS INCLUDES:

- ☒ Calm conversations
- ☒ Comfort items
- ☒ Trusted adults
- ☒ Peer check-ins
- ☒ Routines after the storm

What Kids and Teens May Need

A simple checklist for parents, guardians, teachers, and student leaders.

Kids and teens do not all react the same way after a storm. Some want to talk. Some want distraction. Some seem fine at first and feel stressed later. The goal is not to force a reaction. The goal is to make support easy to find.

Trusted adults	Someone who can answer questions calmly and make safety decisions.
Clear information	Simple updates without constant scary details.
Predictable routines	Meals, sleep, schoolwork, movement, and familiar activities when possible.
Comfort items	Books, music, a hoodie, photos, games, journals, or other familiar items.
A way to ask questions	Space to say, "I am confused" or "I feel nervous."
Breaks from storm coverage	Time away from repeated images, rumors, and doom-scrolling.
Peer connection	Texts, lunch, notes, games, homework help, or just not being alone.
Help when needed	Trusted adult, counselor, doctor, or crisis support if someone may be unsafe.



CALM CHECK:

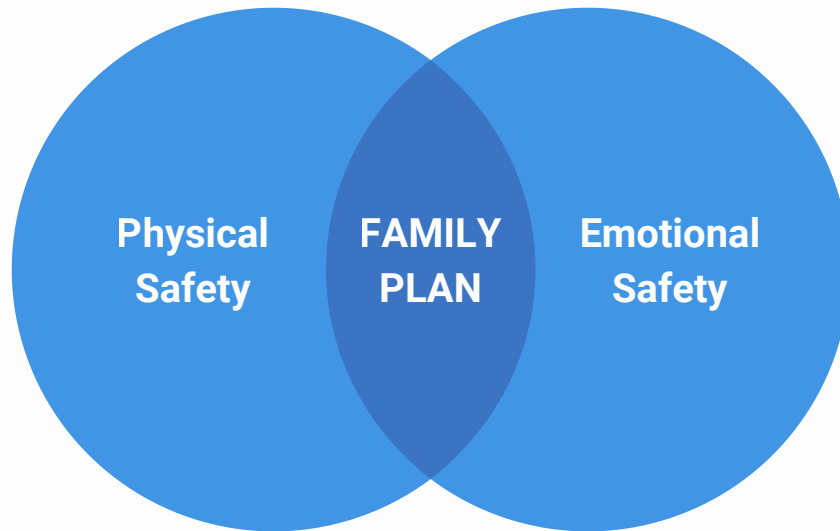
Ask: What would help me feel calmer if our routine changes for a few days?

If someone may be unsafe or overwhelmed, tell a trusted adult immediately.

Physical Safety & Emotional Safety

A hurricane plan should include both.

A family can be physically prepared and still feel emotionally overwhelmed. Ready Together is built around the idea that both kinds of safety matter.



PHYSICAL SAFETY:

- ☐ We know our evacuation zone
- ☐ We know where to shelter
- ☐ We have supplies and water
- ☐ We have medications and documents
- ☐ We have pet and medical plans
- ☐ We follow official alerts

EMOTIONAL SAFETY:

- ☐ Kids know who to ask for help
- ☐ Kids know their safe role
- ☐ We have comfort items ready
- ☐ We take breaks from scary updates
- ☐ We check on friends after the storm
- ☐ We restart routines when possible

A plan should help kids feel included, not responsible.

Kids Should Feel Included, Not Responsible

Students can help. Students should not carry adult emergency decisions.

Being included in the plan can help kids feel safer. Being made responsible for the plan can make kids feel overwhelmed. **There is a big difference.**

STUDENTS CAN HELP BY:

- ☐ Learning the family plan
- ☐ Packing comfort items
- ☐ Charging devices
- ☐ Asking good questions
- ☐ Helping younger kids stay calm
- ☐ Checking pet supplies
- ☐ Sharing official resources

STUDENTS SHOULD **NOT** BE RESPONSIBLE FOR:

- ☐ Deciding whether to evacuate
- ☐ Judging whether a home is safe
- ☐ Handling medical decisions
- ☐ Driving during unsafe conditions
- ☐ Managing insurance or claims
- ☐ Keeping unsafe secrets
- ☐ Carrying someone else's recovery alone



KIDS4KIDS REMINDER:

A helpful student role should feel empowering, not heavy.

Adults and local officials make emergency decisions.

Student Role vs. Adult Role

A clear role can reduce confusion and stress.

Before a storm, it helps to talk about who is responsible for what. Students can do small, safe tasks. Adults handle the safety decisions.

Task	Student Helper	Adult Responsible
Check official alerts	Can remind family to check	Monitors and decides what to do
Pack comfort items	Can pack own items	Makes sure emergency items are complete
Pet supplies	Can check food/toys	Handles pet safety and evacuation choices
Younger siblings	Can play or distract	Makes safety and supervision decisions
Documents	Can remind, not manage	Gathers IDs, policies, and medical papers
Friends after storm	Can check in kindly	Gets adult help if someone may be unsafe



SMALL WIN:

Pick one safe student helper role before a storm is even on the radar.

Students can help, but adults and officials make emergency decisions.

Peer Support Is **Not** Therapy

It is connection, encouragement, and knowing when to get help.

Kids4Kids Relief believes young people can support other young people after disasters. But peer support has boundaries. A friend can listen and include someone. A friend should not try to diagnose, counsel, or carry another person's safety alone.

PEER SUPPORT CAN LOOK LIKE:

- ✓ Sending a kind text
- ✓ Sitting with someone at lunch
- ✓ Offering a distraction
- ✓ Sharing notes or homework help
- ✓ Inviting someone back into a routine
- ✓ Helping them find a trusted adult

PEER SUPPORT SHOULD **NOT BE:**

- ✗ Therapy or counseling
- ✗ Diagnosing a friend
- ✗ Keeping unsafe secrets
- ✗ Taking on adult responsibility
- ✗ Forcing someone to talk
- ✗ Promising you can fix everything





SAFETY FIRST!

If a friend talks about wanting to hurt themselves, disappear, or not be alive, tell a trusted adult immediately.
If there is immediate danger, call 911.

Peer support is not therapy. When in doubt, connect with a trusted adult or professional.

Notice. Listen. Support. Connect.



PEER SUPPORT MOMENT

You do not have to fix everything. Sometimes the best support is staying kind and helping someone find the right adult.

A simple Kids4Kids peer-support model.

This is an easy way to remember how students can help each other after a storm without trying to become counselors.



NOTICE.

Pay attention if a friend seems withdrawn, overwhelmed, angry, unusually quiet, or unlike themselves.



LISTEN.

Let them talk if they want to. Do not force details or try to compare stories.



SUPPORT.

Offer normal things: a walk, a game, a text, sitting together, homework help, or a distraction.



CONNECT.

If you are worried, help them connect with a trusted adult, school counselor, parent, coach, or crisis resource.

If someone may be unsafe, tell a trusted adult immediately.

How to Check on a Friend After a Storm

Sometimes the right words are simple.

You do not need a perfect speech. Most of the time, a kind and normal message is better than trying too hard.

TRY SAYING:

"I'm glad you're safe."

"Do you want to talk, or do you want a distraction?"

"I can sit with you if you want."

"Want me to send you the notes from class?"

"I don't know exactly what to say, but I'm here."

YOU CAN ALSO DO:

- ☐ Text or call
- ☐ Invite them to lunch or a walk
- ☐ Share school notes
- ☐ Play a game
- ☐ Send a funny but respectful distraction
- ☐ Help them find an adult if needed



CALM CHECK:

If a friend does not want to talk, respect that. You can still let them know they are not alone.

Peer support should feel kind, respectful, and pressure-free.

What Not to Say

Even kind people can accidentally make someone feel dismissed.

After a disaster, people may be stressed, tired, embarrassed, angry, or grieving. Try not to minimize what happened or pressure someone to be okay.



PEER SUPPORT MOMENT

Good support does not force someone to feel better. It helps them feel less alone.

AVOID SAYING:

"At least it wasn't worse."

"Everything happens for a reason."

"You should be over it by now."

"I know exactly how you feel."

"Don't be dramatic."

"Other people had it worse."

TRY INSTEAD:

"I'm sorry you're dealing with this."

"I'm here if you want to talk."

"Do you want company or space?"

"That sounds really hard."

"Can I help you find an adult to talk to?"

"You don't have to explain everything."

If someone may be unsafe or overwhelmed, tell a trusted adult immediately.

When to Get Adult Help

Some things are too heavy for a friend to carry alone.

Friendship matters, but student support has limits. If you feel worried about someone's safety or you feel scared by what they told you, it is time to bring in a trusted adult.

TELL A TRUSTED ADULT IF SOMEONE:

- ☐ Talks about wanting to hurt themselves
- ☐ Says they do not want to be alive
- ☐ Seems unsafe or in danger
- ☐ Is panicking often or cannot calm down
- ☐ Stops eating or sleeping normally for a while
- ☐ Withdraws from everyone for a long time
- ☐ Makes you feel scared by what they shared



TRUSTED ADULTS COULD INCLUDE:

- ☒ Parent or guardian
- ☒ School counselor
- ☒ Teacher
- ☒ Coach
- ☒ Doctor or pediatrician
- ☒ Youth group leader
- ☒ Emergency responder
- ☒ 988 or crisis support if immediate emotional crisis



SAFETY FIRST!

If there is immediate danger, call 911.
For emotional crisis support in the U.S., call or text 988.

Do not promise secrecy if someone may be unsafe.

Trusted Adult Plan



CALM CHECK:

Asking for help is not being dramatic.
It is a strong and safe thing to do.

Write down who kids and teens can go to for help.

It is easier to ask for help when you already know who the safe people are. Fill this out before a storm, not during the most stressful moment.

01

Trusted adult at home:

02

Trusted adult at school:

03

Trusted coach / mentor:

04

Doctor or pediatrician:

05

School counselor:

06

Youth group / community adult:

07

Emergency emotional support resource:

WHAT I CAN SAY IF I NEED HELP:

"I am feeling overwhelmed and need to talk to someone."

If someone may be unsafe, tell a trusted adult immediately.

Media & Rumor Boundaries

Information helps. Too much scary information can hurt.

Storm updates are important, but constant scrolling can make kids and adults feel more anxious. Choose trusted sources and take breaks when you can.

USE TRUSTED SOURCES:

- ☒ Local emergency management
- ☒ National Weather Service
- ☒ National Hurricane Center
- ☒ School alerts
- ☒ FEMA app or official resources
- ☒ Local officials

SET **HEALTHY** LIMITS:

- ☐ Do not rely only on group chats
- ☐ Do not repost unverified information
- ☐ Take breaks from storm footage
- ☐ Ask an adult what an alert means
- ☐ Turn off alerts that are not useful
- ☐ Do something calming after checking updates



PRO TIP:

Create a family update schedule: morning, afternoon, evening, and whenever an official alert is issued. Constant checking is usually not necessary.

Use official alerts and local emergency instructions. Do not rely only on social media.

Family Calm PLAN

A few calm choices can help when routines change.

This page is not about pretending everything is fine. It is about knowing what helps your family feel a little steadier when things feel uncertain.

ONE QUESTION I WANT TO ASK MY FAMILY:

A TRUSTED ADULT I CAN TALK TO:

ONE THING THAT HELPS OUR FAMILY STAY CALM:

ONE ROUTINE WE WANT TO RESTART AFTER THE STORM:

WHEN I FEEL NERVOUS, I CAN:

A COMFORT ITEM I WANT NEARBY:

A CALMING ACTIVITY I CAN USE:



KIDS4KIDS REMINDER:

Kids should be able to ask questions without feeling like they are bothering anyone.

If stress feels too big to handle alone, connect with a trusted adult or professional.

Comfort Items Matter

Comfort items are not extras. They help kids feel grounded.

When routines are disrupted, familiar items can make an unfamiliar situation feel more manageable. A comfort item does not have to be expensive. It just has to be something that helps a kid or teen feel like themselves.

FOR YOUNGER KIDS:

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ Stuffed animal | ☐ Small toy |
| ☐ Blanket | ☐ Favorite book |
| ☐ Coloring book | |

FOR TEENS:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| ☐ Hoodie | ☐ Playlist downloaded |
| ☐ Headphones | ☐ Photos |
| ☐ Journal | |

FOR ANYONE:

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Cards or small game | ☐ Personal note |
| ☐ Art supplies | ☐ Something that feels like home |
| ☐ Prayer/faith item if wanted | |



SMALL WIN:

Ask each child or teen to choose one comfort item before hurricane season and store it near the go bag.

Comfort items support coping, but they do not replace adult support when a child is overwhelmed.

Normalcy Matters

After a storm, familiar routines can help kids feel like themselves again.

Disaster recovery is not only about fixing buildings. For kids and teens, recovery can also mean getting back to school, sports, friends, hobbies, music, books, pets, and the small things that make life feel normal.

NORMALCY CAN INCLUDE:

- ☐ Returning to school routines
- ☐ Talking with friends
- ☐ Playing a sport or instrument
- ☐ Reading, drawing, or gaming
- ☐ Wearing familiar clothes
- ☐ Helping with a safe small task

READY TOGETHER CAN SUPPORT NORMALCY BY:

- ☐ Packing comfort bags
- ☐ Creating Normalcy Kits
- ☐ Checking on peers
- ☐ Sharing school supplies
- ☐ Hosting chapter projects
- ☐ Helping kids feel seen



KIDS4KIDS REMINDER:

A Normalcy Kit is not just a bag of things. It is a reminder that kids still matter after the emergency headlines move on.

Recovery is physical and emotional. Ask for help when support is needed.

Supporting Younger Kids

Simple words, routines, and comfort can help.

Younger kids may not understand storm updates the same way adults do. They may ask the same question more than once, cling to adults, act younger than usual, or show stress through behavior instead of words.

HELPFUL ADULT RESPONSES:

- ✓ Use simple words
- ✓ Keep explanations honest but gentle
- ✓ Offer comfort items
- ✓ Keep routines when possible
- ✓ Let them draw or play
- ✓ Reassure them that adults are handling safety decisions



TRY NOT TO:

- ✗ Overload them with details
- ✗ Keep scary news on all day
- ✗ Make promises you cannot control
- ✗ Laugh at their fears
- ✗ Force them to talk before they are ready
- ✗ Make them responsible for younger siblings



PARENT/GUARDIAN TIP:

A **calm** adult voice can be one of the most important tools a child has during a stressful event.

If a child seems unsafe or severely distressed, contact a trusted professional or emergency service.

Supporting Teens

Teens may want responsibility, privacy, and connection at the same time.

Teenagers may want to help, but that does not mean they should become the emotional adult in the family. Give teens safe jobs, honest information, and space to process without making them carry the crisis.

SUPPORTIVE ACTIONS:

- ☐ Let teens help in safe ways
- ☐ Be honest about the plan
- ☐ Respect privacy when possible
- ☐ Encourage sleep and food
- ☐ Support breaks from social media
- ☐ Ask what would help, instead of assuming



WATCH FOR:

- ☐ Ongoing withdrawal
- ☐ Big sleep or eating changes
- ☐ Panic or intense fear
- ☐ Risk-taking behavior
- ☐ Hopeless comments
- ☐ Feeling responsible for everyone else



CALM CHECK:

A teen might say "I'm fine" and still need support. Keep the door open without forcing the conversation.

If you are worried about a teen's safety, involve a trusted adult or professional immediately.

If You Have Been Through a Disaster Before

Past storms can make new storms feel heavier.

Some families have already lived through hurricanes, flooding, evacuations, or long recovery periods. A new storm can bring back memories even before anything happens. That does not mean someone is weak. It means their brain remembers how hard it was.

SOMETHING ABOUT STORMS THAT FEELS HARD FOR ME:

A SAFE WAY I CAN ASK FOR SUPPORT:

SOMETHING I WISH ADULTS UNDERSTOOD:

SOMETHING THAT HELPED LAST TIME:

A WARNING SIGN THAT I AM GETTING OVERWHELMED:

ONE THING I DO NOT WANT TO BE RESPONSIBLE FOR:



CALM CHECK:

It is okay if a new storm makes old feelings show up. Tell a trusted adult if the stress feels too big to handle alone.

Self-Care for Youth Volunteers

Helping others should not mean ignoring yourself.

Kids4Kids Relief is youth-led, but student leaders are still students. If you are helping after a disaster, you also need rest, boundaries, trusted adults, and time to feel like yourself.

BEFORE HELPING OTHERS:

- ☐ Check in with your own family
- ☐ Know your safe role
- ☐ Have an adult advisor
- ☐ Understand what you can and cannot promise
- ☐ Know who to contact if you are worried about someone



PEER SUPPORT BOUNDARY

You can care deeply without becoming responsible for everyone. **Strong leaders know when to ask for help.**

AFTER HELPING OTHERS:

- ☐ Take a break
- ☐ Talk to a trusted adult
- ☐ Do something normal
- ☐ Avoid carrying stories alone
- ☐ Step back if it feels too heavy

Youth volunteers should always work with trusted adult guidance.

Caregiver Tone Matters

Kids often look to adults to understand how serious a situation is.

Adults do not have to pretend everything is perfect. But calm, clear communication can help kids feel safer. A simple explanation is usually better than silence or constant scary updates.

WORDS THAT CAN HELP:

"We have a plan."

"We are watching official updates."

"You are not responsible for adult decisions."

"You can ask questions."

"We will handle this together."

TRY INSTEAD:

Talking about worst-case scenarios all day

Leaving kids to guess what is happening

Arguing in front of kids about safety decisions

Dismissing fears as silly

Making teens the family messenger



PARENT/GUARDIAN TIP:

You can be honest without being frightening. Kids need clear information and reassurance that adults are handling the decisions.

If a child's stress seems intense or ongoing, reach out to a school counselor, pediatrician, or mental health professional

Youth Wellness Reflection

Use this page to choose one support step before moving on.

You do not have to have every answer. The point is to notice what helps, write it down, and know where support can come from.



**ONE THING THAT HELPS ME
FEEL SAFER:**

**ONE THING THAT HELPS ME
FEEL CALMER:**

ONE PERSON I CAN TALK TO:

**ONE FRIEND I MAY WANT TO
CHECK ON:**

**ONE COMFORT ITEM I WANT
READY:**

ONE QUESTION I STILL HAVE:

**ONE SMALL STEP I CAN TAKE
THIS WEEK:**



SMALL WIN:

If you filled out even one line on this page, you have already started building your support plan.



KIDS4KIDS REMINDER:

Preparedness protects safety. Peer support protects connection. Kids need both.

Next section: Ready Together Preparedness Essentials.