

Gulf Oil Spill: Get the Facts

MENTAL HEALTH RESOURCES

ESCAMBIA COUNTY

LAKEVIEW CENTER
1221 W. LAKEVIEW AVE.
PENSACOLA, FL 32501
(850) 469-3500

24-HOUR CRISIS LINE
850.438.1617

SANTA ROSA COUNTY

AVALON CENTER OF LAKEVIEW
6024 SPIKES WAY
MILTON, FL 32570
850.437.8900

24-HOUR CRISIS LINE
850.438.1617

OKALOOSA COUNTY

BRIDGEWAY CENTER
24-HOUR CRISIS LINE
850.833.9200

WALTON COUNTY

COPE CENTER
24-HOUR CRISIS LINE
850.892.4357

If you need additional behavioral health assistance, please contact your local community provider listed above.



Helping Young Children During the Oil Spill Crisis

The Gulf Oil Spill has affected the whole community and wreaked havoc on the lives of many people on the Gulf Coast. During these stressful times, it may not be first on your mind to think about the effects on children ages 0-5. You may think that babies and young children are immune from stress since they can't understand what is happening. You may think that a three-year-old is not impacted, so he should not feel anything about the spill.

Infant mental health is defined as the healthy social and emotional development of a child from birth to 5 years. Infant mental health focuses on the relationship between a child and his or her caregivers and how this relationship promotes social and emotional growth.

Should I tell my young child about the crisis?

How do I explain it? If your child is not asking about it, you do not have to bring it up. Three to five year olds who are exposed to media or who attend childcare might have heard about it and will ask questions. Answer their questions in age-appropriate terms with an emphasis on the fact that you will keep them safe. Whatever problems are going on are grown-up problems, and lots of grown ups are working hard to fix the problem. In the meantime, you as the parent will always keep

them safe.

What if my child is blaming himself?

This is normal. Children think the world revolves around them. Thus, they may think that something they did caused the oil spill. Reassure your child, even if they aren't verbalizing blame, that nothing they did caused this, and that sometimes things just happen and it is important for everyone to find solutions.

What if he is acting out the oil spill in play?

Should I stop him? Definitely not. Play is a child's way of exploring feelings and themes from his life and trying to make sense of them. Provide opportunities for your child to play with you. Setting aside as little as 15 minutes a day and letting your child lead in play can show you a lot about his inner world and how he is doing emotionally. Let him lead and play along. Sometimes children will act out the same scene over and over trying to make sense of it. In your responses, you can reassure him that you will make things safe for him and help the characters find positive solutions.

What else can I do?

Spend time with your child. Play, go on a walk, volunteer together. There are programs at local nature centers. You can go on hikes, fishing and camping trips,

and other outdoor activities that foster care for the planet. Encourage your child to donate loose change to wildlife or clean-up organizations. Start a recycling program in your own home and let him help. Most of all, be available to your child and reassure him that you will take care of him no matter what.

What if I don't feel like I can cope?

Be aware that if you are not coping well, your child will feel that. Young children are sponges for your emotions and will know something is wrong even if they cannot verbalize it. This causes distress in the child. If you are feeling overwhelmed, seek support from your family, church, community, and work to manage stress. If you can't seem to get on top of it, seek professional help. You will not only be doing something positive for you, but you will be helping your baby.

Resources: Zero To Three: Early Childhood Mental Health
National Wildlife Federation:
How to talk to kids about the Oil Spill