



# Children in Disasters

How Children Cope  
and How Responders Can Help

# Objectives

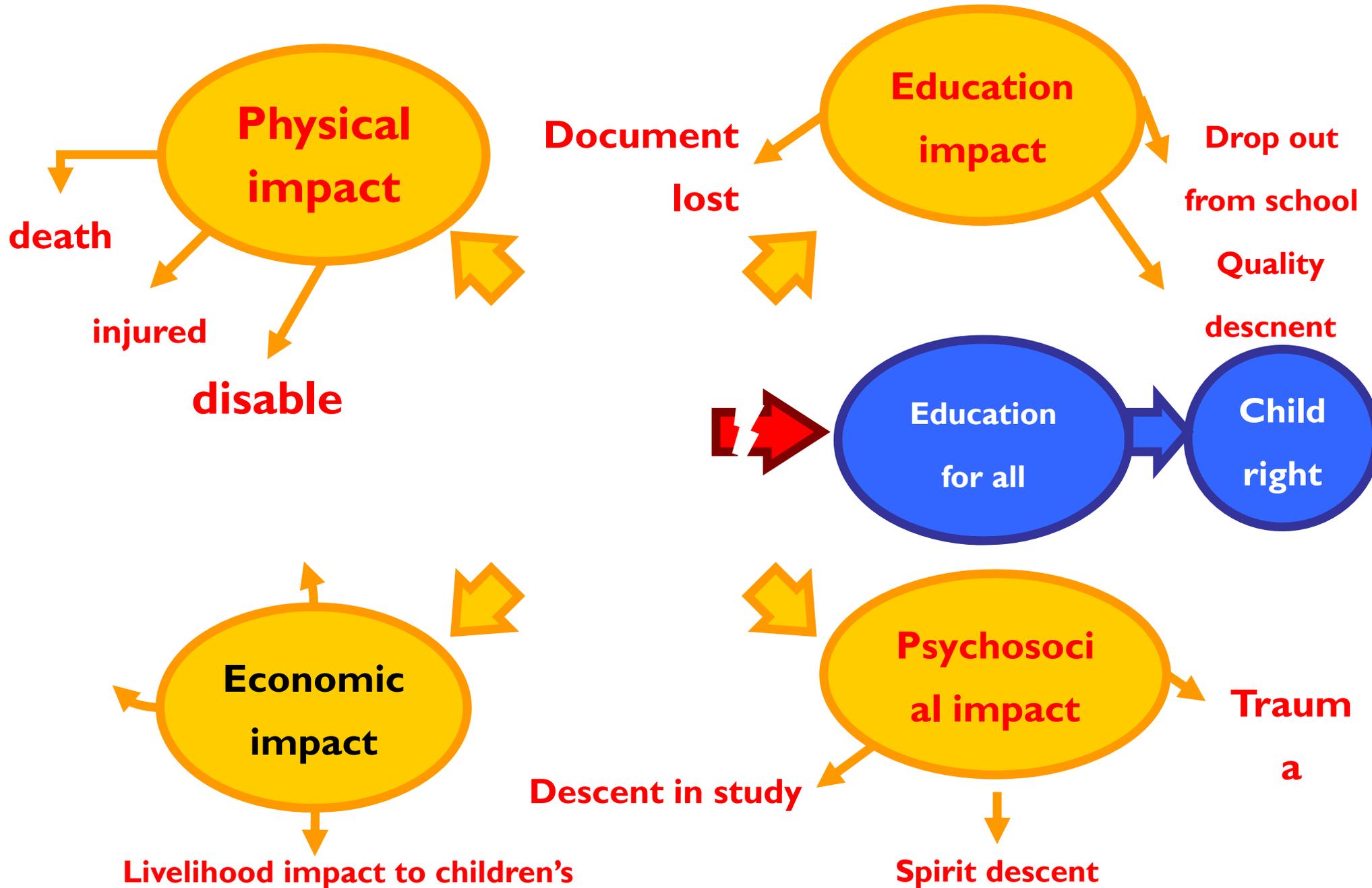
- An overview of disasters and their impact on children
- Children's reactions by developmental level
- Special issues and their impact on children
- How Responders can reduce the impact of disaster on children



# Facts n Figures

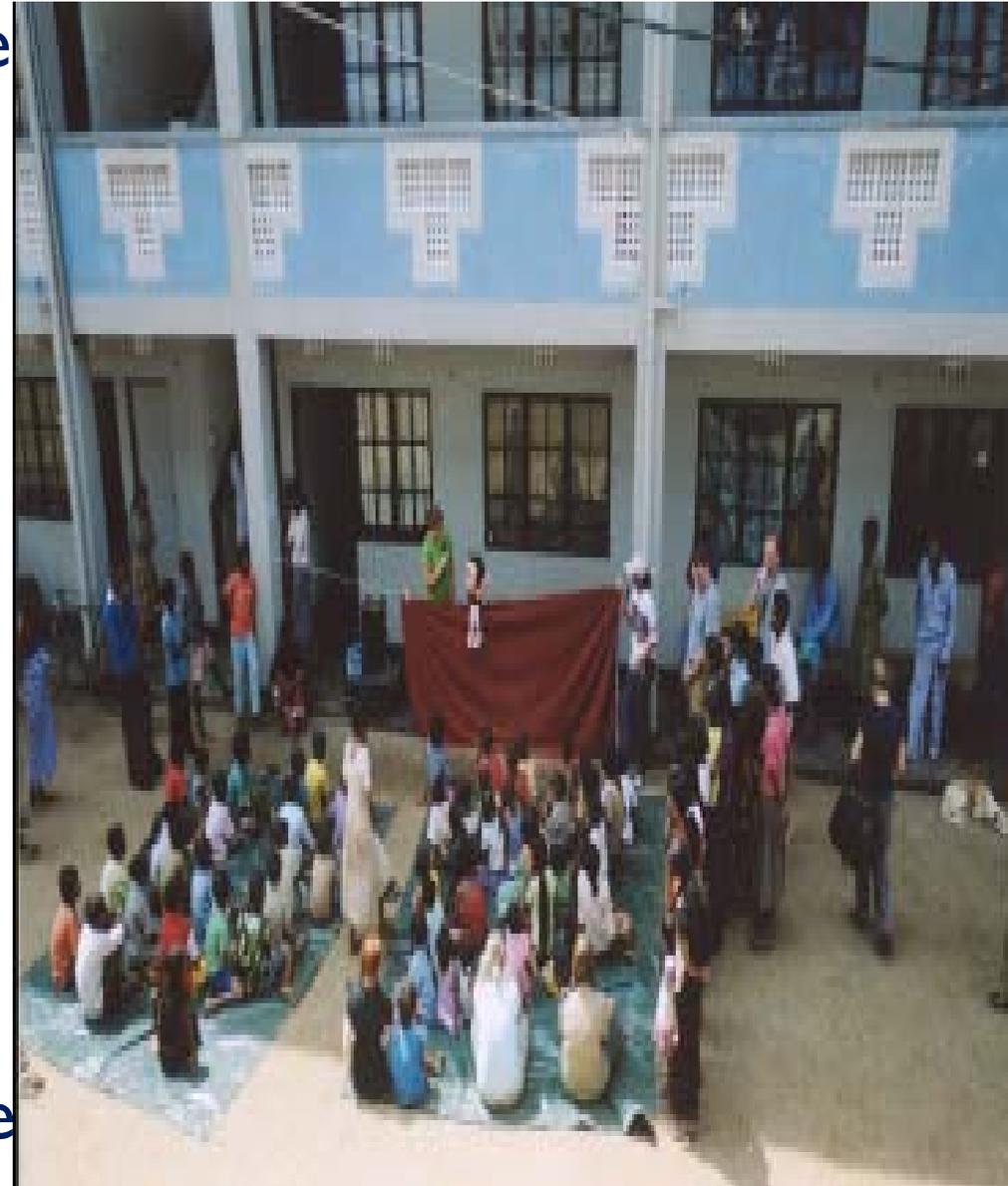
- Over the past decade, disasters have continued to put a heavy toll, on the well-being and safety of persons, communities and countries.
- Over 700,000 people lost their lives, over 1.4 million were injured and approximately 23 million were displaced as a result of disasters.
- Overall, more than 1.5 billion people were affected by disasters in various ways.
- Women, children and people in vulnerable situations were disproportionately affected.
- Disaster risk is already undermining the capacity of many countries to make the capital investments and social expenditures necessary to develop sustainably.
- The total economic loss was more than \$1.3 trillion
- Mortality is concentrated in very intensive disasters
- However, mortality from smaller-scale events continues to increase and a large amount of damage occurs in small disaster events; constantly eroding essential development assets.

# Impact of disaster on children



# Indian Ocean Tsunami December 26, 2005

- Overcrowded camps – abuse
- Loss of one or both parents
- 6 months later bodies still being recovered, others will never be found
- Narrowly escaped death themselves, bodily injuries, disabilities
- Loss of sense of security (the monster sea)



# Indian Ocean Tsunami

December 26, 2005

- Children separated, missing,
  - Lack of sound documentation & reporting of unaccompanied children hampers response & heightens risks
- Child labor, sexual exploitation, trafficking, recruitment by Anti-Social elements
- Traumatized adults
  - Large extended families that take in multiple children may not be able to provide the nurture and loving care critical for child development
- Loss of structure – families, homes, schools, hospitals etc
- Inequitable aid in aftermath

## A Wave of Reactions

- Avoidance of sea
- Increased nightmares
- Some may develop PTSD or other disorders such as depression
- 5% do not interact with peers or cry excessively
- Some have developed disorders with no organic basis such as facial paralysis
- Vast majority play in camps are not isolated and do not exhibit serious dysfunction
- Risk by developmental age



# Risk by Developmental Age

- **Under 5** = significant risk:
  - Overwhelmed young mothers; children at risk of malnutrition and disease
  - In care of relatives or friends while mothers search for work; others left alone while parents searched for potable water, food
  - Lack attention to health & proper care
  - Separated children at risk of inappropriate adoptions
  - Orphaned children placed in institutions



# Risk by Developmental Age

## School Age

- In camps interact with peers, help parents, engage in play – some very rough
- Loss of structures that provide normalcy destroyed
- Orphans – risk of alienation & despair ever present
- Separated children at risk of institutionalization, marginalized & subject to child labor



# Risk by Developmental Age

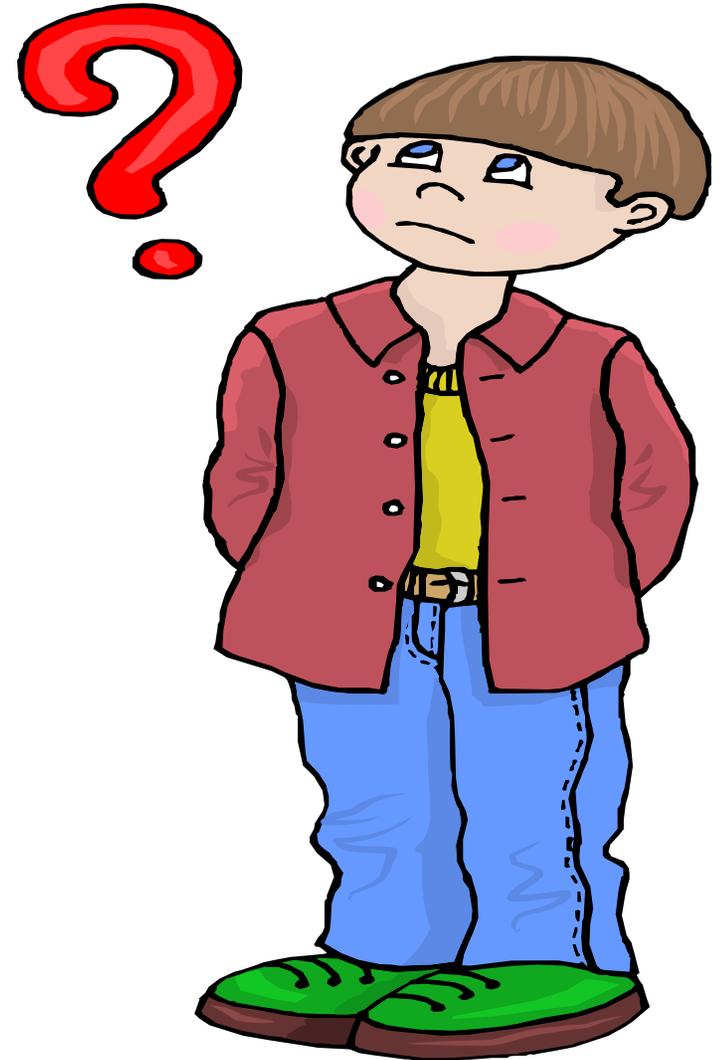
## Teenagers:

- Affected more severely compared to younger children (parental report)
- Able to conceptualize the magnitude of the disaster, their mortality and the effects on their future
- Teen girls at risk of sexual harassment, sexual exploitation & HIV/AIDS in centers/camps
- Need to reduce household pressure could lead to early marriage for girls, Increasing domestic burdens and threaten their schooling



# The first few hours: Children/Youth will need to know

- Adults are in control and will help keep them safe
- That what they are feeling in response to the disaster is normal



# The first few hours - What to Do:

Safety and Security first

If evacuating children from daycare or school, keep each room grouped together if possible

Keep children near familiar peers and adults

Do not allow children to detach themselves from the group – unless

Child is having very difficult time & needs personal attention

Sibling is with another group and you can reunite the siblings



# The first few hours:

## What to Do:

- Shield children from seeing damage or severe injuries if possible
- Use distraction techniques
- If a child becomes distraught, have an adult who knows her provide comfort
- Model good coping.
- Meet children's physical needs



# The first few hours: What to say

- Provide clear simple explanations for what happened and what will happen (reunification with caregivers)
- Acknowledge children's feelings and help them label them
- Admit it if you do not know the answers to the children's questions.
- Reflect children's feelings
  - **but**, redirect from talking about gruesome details
- Praise children and youth
  - Following instructions
  - Helping others
  - Being brave
- Summarize the disaster and its resolution

