

Be Prepared, Not Scared: Your Guide to Staying at a Disaster Shelter

Staying in a shelter can be hard. You might feel stressed being away from home, school, and your regular routine. It's important to take care of yourself and stay healthy.



Carve out your comfort zone.

Shelters can be crowded, making it difficult to feel comfortable and find personal space.

- **Find a space where you can set up your stuff.** Use headphones to listen to your favorite music or podcasts, read a book, play card games, or find something else that helps you relax and make it a part of your day.
- **Don't be shy about asking for help.** If you are struggling to get comfortable or feel settled in your space, ask a parent, trusted adult, or shelter staff member for help. For example, if you are feeling too warm, ask if there is a fan available or ask for a wet washcloth to use to cool down.



Protect your mental health.

It's normal to feel stressed, sad, scared, or overwhelmed when you're living through a disaster. You may:

- Have trouble sleeping or have nightmares
- Feel isolated, detached, or vulnerable
- Have unexplained pain, like headaches, stomachaches, or muscle aches

If you are having these feelings or reactions, speak up. You can talk to your parents, another trusted adult, or shelter staff to get help and support. You can also call or text the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's Disaster Distress Hotline: 1-800-985-5990. No one will judge you for experiencing strong feelings during a disaster.

You can also try healthy coping strategies:

- Use calming techniques, like deep breathing or counting exercises, to help you relax.
- Try fun activities, like reading a book or playing games with your family, to help you stay occupied.
- Get active with gentle exercises, like walking or stretching.
- Stay connected to your friends through socials, texting, and calls if you have access to a phone.
- Take a break from news or social media if it's making you feel bad—don't doomscroll!





Fuel your body.

- Stay hydrated by drinking water. Only drink water provided by the shelter or that you know is safe to drink.
- Eat food you're sure is safe, like food provided by shelter staff. Be sure to eat regularly throughout the day and ask your parents, a trusted adult, or shelter staff for snacks if needed.



Play it safe.

- Know the shelter's rules and always follow them to stay safe and comfortable.
- Keep your belongings secure and be aware of your surroundings.
- If you see or experience something that makes you feel unsafe or uncomfortable, tell your parents or a trusted adult and shelter staff.



Stay fresh and clean.

Maintaining good hygiene can help you stay healthy in a shelter.

- Wash your hands often with soap and water for at least 20 seconds, especially before eating and after using the restroom. Use alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and clean water are not available.
- Try to keep up with personal hygiene as much as you can, including showering, brushing teeth, and wearing clean clothes.
- Cover your coughs and sneezes to prevent the spread of germs that can make other people sick. Consider wearing a mask if you have one.
- If you start to feel sick while you're at the shelter, tell a parent or other trusted adult and ask them to talk to shelter staff. Try to stay as far away from other people as space allows.

If you have your period, make sure you have access to sanitary products and change them regularly. Don't hesitate to ask shelter staff for supplies if needed.



For more information, visit
www.cdc.gov/natural-disasters/teens.