

DISCARD WATER-LOGGED TOYS

I threw out the carpet, the sofa and the chair. But how do I throw out my child's teddy bear? Teddy bears, velveteen rabbits and baby toys may have to be thrown away if they've been contaminated by floodwaters. Water-soaked stuffing likely will require that a toy be tossed.

Every adult who remembers a favorite toy can empathize with the pain these losses will bring to children. No talk about germs and sanitation will ease the pain caused by the loss of a special toy.

The hard reality is the flood is bringing painful losses. Adults can't make everything OK for children. But they can view the situation from the children's level of understanding. By looking through children's eyes, adults can grasp the feelings, reactions and fears of children.

Accept children's emotions as real and legitimate and deserving of attention. To deny these emotions or make fun of them would undermine children's trust and confidence.

Dispose of toys in a manner suitable to the emotion each child feels. A teddy bear thrown on top of a garbage heap only makes the loss harder to take.

To help children deal with their emotions:

- Ease the transition with a brief funeral ceremony. Let children prepare a special burial box or bag.
- Select children's books about loss to read with children. Ask the local librarian for suggestions. One possibility is *The Velveteen Rabbit* about a boy's favorite toy rabbit that becomes contaminated by the child's own germs during an illness. Although the toy must be destroyed, the boy overcomes his grief when he learns of the rabbit's wonderful transformation. Stories can assure children that other children in the world face the same problem and give suggestions on how to manage the situation.
- Use art materials to help children express feelings and concerns. Some children may need to express feelings that might be considered negative and unacceptable. Learning to express emotions through creative channels gives children an outlet for pent-up tension. Art experiences that include movement will help young children who are limited in verbal ability. Consider clay for pounding and pinching, paper for tearing and cutting, and finger paints for wiping and smearing.
- Puppets also provide a way to express emotions and examine solutions.

Source: Iowa State University and North Dakota State University Extension Service