

# Disaster Alert

**Aim:** This assembly will help pupils to understand more about disasters, and can be used in response to a new disaster when it happens.

**Materials/preparation:**

- You may wish to use the accompanying *Disaster Alert* assembly presentation, available to download from [christianaid.org.uk/learn](http://christianaid.org.uk/learn)
- Space has been left for you to adapt this assembly by inputting information about a new disaster. For updates on disasters affecting people in developing countries, visit news websites and [christianaid.org.uk/emergencies](http://christianaid.org.uk/emergencies)

## Assembly presentation

**Show slide 1.** Ask students to close their eyes for a quick imagination exercise. *Imagine that you are relaxing quietly at home. Picture your house...your favourite belongings...your books...your brothers and sisters. Now imagine there's a loud knocking at the door. You go to the door and open it. One of your cousins is standing there, and he's out of breath – he's obviously been running very fast. 'Quick!', he shouts, 'Floods! Get out! Get out now! Run for your lives!'*

*You don't have much time to stop and collect your belongings. What would you grab on your way out of the door – would it be a photo album? Your music collection, or favourite games console? The hand of your brother or sister, so that you could help him or her to escape the rising water?*

Ask the students to open their eyes and ask a few to share how they would feel and what they might try to save from the flood.

**Show slide 2.** *Thankfully emergencies like this do not happen often in Britain and Ireland. Sometimes we have flooding in some areas, and people's homes and businesses are damaged. People's belongings get ruined: photos and personal possessions cannot be easily replaced, although we usually have insurance policies that help us to replace most of our belongings. Luckily we have regular forecasts that help us prepare for bad weather, and there are lots of people on standby to help others get to safety if conditions are really severe.*

**Show slide 3.** *But this is not the case in every country in the world. Juan David Paz is seven*

*and lives in Guatemala. He experienced a situation almost exactly like the one we just tried to imagine. His home was destroyed by floods. Because the floodwater rose so quickly, his family had little warning or time to escape. When Juan David's cousin came running to warn them, Juan David and his family had to escape first on foot and then by boat, leaving all their belongings behind. Like most of you, Juan David made the decision that the most important thing to keep safe from the floods was his family. Luckily they were all ok, though he was separated from his mum, who was sheltering in another place, for over a week. At one point, Juan David had to climb a tree to escape the water, and saw his house get washed away. **Show slide 4.***

Ask the students: *How do you think Juan David must have felt when his cousin banged on the door? Can you imagine how much he must have missed his mum during the eight days they were apart? How do you think he felt when his house was washed away?*

**Show slide 5.** *It is difficult to imagine these things. But the charity Christian Aid knows that it is very important to try to understand the experiences of people living through disasters, like a major flood, so that we can understand how to best help them – both when a disaster strikes and also to help them to prepare for anything that might happen in the future.*

*Christian Aid works with partner organisations all around the world to help people affected by disasters when they happen. For example, in Guatemala, where flooding is quite common, it worked with an organisation called CPDL, which helped families like Juan David's to prepare for flooding and helps ensure they keep themselves and their homes safe.*

**Show slide 6.** Sometimes the problem is not too much water, but not enough. For example, large parts of Ethiopia, in east Africa, are hot and dry, and less than half of the people who live here have clean water for drinking and washing. When the rains fail, it is harder to grow crops and many people go hungry.

In 2011, very dry weather across east Africa meant that many families were hungry. Christian Aid partners were on hand with emergency supplies of food, water and medicine to help people survive the drought.

It is thought that some kinds of extreme weather – like floods, droughts and hurricanes – are becoming more common because of climate change. But Christian Aid understands that people all over the world are incredibly adaptable, and that difficult situations only become disasters when people are not prepared – or when they lack the resources to cope with problems. An important part of the way Christian Aid deals with disasters is to help people make changes to their lives that mean they will be able to cope better if disaster strikes again.

**Show slide 7.** For example CPDL helped communities to draw up maps so that when another flood happens the people in the most danger can be helped first.

**Show slide 8.** And in Ethiopia, as well as supporting people during times of drought, Agri Service Ethiopia has helped people to find new ways to farm different types of crops that grow well in dry weather. Growing a range of food means that if one crop fails, they still have other crops to grow and eat.

**Show slide 9.** Of course, disasters come in all sorts of shapes and sizes – and sometimes they strike without any warning at all. In 2010, the biggest earthquake to hit the country of Haiti in the Caribbean for more than 200 years caused utter devastation. Although it only lasted a few minutes, the earthquake killed around 220,000 people and injured a further 300,000. Although

the recovery process from such a big disaster has been long and slow, hundreds of families are feeling the benefit of new, earthquake-resistant homes, built by Christian Aid partner Haiti Survie. **Show slide 10.**

**Show slide 11.** It can be hard to predict where the next disaster will strike – or what it might be. But Christian Aid partners are working around the world – and they understand that when disaster strikes, it often affects the poorest people the most. Ask students to suggest reasons why disaster might impact most on the very poorest.

**Show slide 12.** Christian Aid partners help people with the emergency things they might need to survive after a disaster. Ask students if they can think what things people might need after a disaster (answers might include: locating families; food; water; medicine; shelter).

**Show slide 13.** And when the cameras have stopped rolling and the news teams have left, Christian Aid's partners will stick around for the long-term, helping people with the lengthy process of recovery and enabling them to prepare better for disasters in the future. Ask students if they can think of things that might help people cope with future disasters (answers might include: finding ways to get a warning to people about impending disasters before they happen; having an emergency plan so the most vulnerable can be evacuated first; building stronger houses to withstand bad weather; working together to help each other).

**You can reflect on a recent disaster/a disaster you are studying/a disaster in the news. Try to include information about:**

- the type of disaster and where it happened
- the number of people affected
- why people were vulnerable
- what is being done to help people cope with the immediate effects of the disaster
- how people will be helped to cope in the longer term and prepare for future disasters.

## Reflection

We are very lucky to live in a country where serious disasters, such as severe flooding and drought, are very rare, and where the risk of being injured in an earthquake or hurricane is small. Even if we do encounter disaster, we have a range of services that are on hand to support and help us. Let us think of those around the world [perhaps those who have been harmed in this latest disaster], who are vulnerable to disaster, and who do not have the means to cope.

## Action

- Download the full *Disasters* pack, which includes film clips, worksheets, case studies, games and teaching notes, from [christianaid.org.uk/learn-disaster-secondary](http://christianaid.org.uk/learn-disaster-secondary) (from April 2013)
- When a disaster happens, you can find out more details about Christian Aid's response and what you can do to support it, from [christianaid.org.uk/emergencies](http://christianaid.org.uk/emergencies)