

Dealing with Disasters

Lesson plan 3: Disaster strikes

Age group: 11-14

Aims:

To help students acquire information about appropriate disaster responses.

To challenge students' existing perceptions about disaster response.

You will need

A photocopy of the **worksheet: Disaster strikes** and **worksheet: answer sheet** (both below) for each pair of students.

What to do

In pairs, ask students to imagine that they are part of a disaster response team which has to make rapid decisions about issues which affect survivors. Students should complete the **worksheet: Disaster strikes** (below).

Come together as a class and discuss students' answers. Was it easy to agree on the right approach? What other issues might have to be considered?

Now give out the **answers sheet** (below) and allow some time to compare responses. Were students particularly surprised by any answers? What other issues might relief teams need to consider? You might introduce factors such as the importance of knowing about the local languages, culture, resources, organisations, health systems, etc. It is also helpful to discuss the connections between disaster relief and development. Longer-term programmes which promote economic development and fight underlying causes such as poverty have a significant effect in reducing people's vulnerability to the effects of disaster.

Note for teachers

Students might find it hard to think in general terms, rather than concentrating on a specific disaster. In this case, you might suggest that they base their answers on a disaster they are more familiar with. However, the activity will be a good starting point for a discussion about the decisions which need to be made after a major disaster, and will also challenge preconceptions. It is important to recognise that although individual situations are very different, there are still general principles which will apply.

Dealing with Disasters

Worksheet: Disaster strikes

Imagine that you are in charge of a relief operation and you have just arrived at the scene of the disaster. Below are some decisions. Decide whether they are right or wrong, and write your reason in the space provided.

1	<p>Immediately you receive the news of the disaster, you send out an urgent appeal for international assistance from doctors, nurses, and other medical staff.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Right <input type="checkbox"/> Wrong</p> <p>.....Reason</p>
2	<p>Through the press and TV, you ask people in Britain not to collect and send medicines, clothing and equipment.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Right <input type="checkbox"/> Wrong</p> <p>.....Reason</p>
3	<p>The top priority must be gathering and disposing of dead bodies, because there is a danger that they will cause infectious diseases.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Right <input type="checkbox"/> Wrong</p> <p>.....Reason</p>
4	<p>It is best to house people as close as possible to their own homes, rather than in resettlement camps.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Right <input type="checkbox"/> Wrong</p> <p>.....Reason</p>
5	<p>Food is a top priority after a major disaster, otherwise people will starve.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Right <input type="checkbox"/> Wrong</p> <p>.....Reason</p>

6	<p>When there are limited food supplies, the young and the old should be given food first.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Right <input type="checkbox"/> Wrong</p> <p>.....Reason</p>
7	<p>When disaster strikes, individual team members who live in the area should take care of their own family and belongings first.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Right <input type="checkbox"/> Wrong</p> <p>.....Reason</p>
8	<p>You ask the police and the army to guard homes, shops, and factories. This will stop people from stealing things while the owners are not there.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Right <input type="checkbox"/> Wrong</p> <p>.....Reason</p>
9	<p>Even weeks after the disaster you must expect things to be far from back to normal. Most services will not be running properly.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Right <input type="checkbox"/> Wrong</p> <p>.....Reason</p>
10	<p>The disaster will have focused the world's attention on the plight of the people you have been helping. If a disaster happens here again, it will be easier to raise the resources you need. The disaster will not have such a devastating effect.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> Right <input type="checkbox"/> Wrong</p> <p>.....Reason</p>

Worksheet: Disaster strikes - Answers

1 Wrong - Local health services are normally able to cope in case of disaster. People from the area can speak the local language and are familiar with the local culture and environment. They know what health services already exist and how to use them. Foreign teams may provide specialist skills and equipment, but they have to be fed and housed.

2 Right - It is important that the wrong items are not sent. Disaster-relief teams do not want to be occupied with sorting out items that can or cannot be used. Concerned people in Britain should wait to hear exactly what is needed, or should give money to agencies so that the right materials can be bought.

3 Wrong - Bodies do not cause epidemics, or transmit diseases during the first seventy-two hours after death. The top priority is rescuing and caring for the injured.

4 Right - Keeping people as close as possible to their homes is the best option. Settlement camps are a last resort, since they have problems of their own. Illness can spread more easily if people are living in cramped conditions, and psychologically it is better for people to stay in their own environment, if possible. International help in the form of building materials and tools may be needed, however.

5 Right - Food is a top priority after a flood or a hurricane, but it should be stored and given out properly. After the disaster, giving seeds and tools so that people can grow their own food is important.

6 Wrong - Food should be given to everyone. People who are involved in rescuing and rebuilding work (not usually the youngest or eldest) need a regular food supply so that they can continue working.

7 Wrong - Although it is understandable that individuals will wish to take care of the own families first, teamwork is very important in a disaster. Sometimes teams can be trained beforehand so that each person knows what they should do.

8 Wrong - The media often report that selfish behaviour is common after a disaster. In fact, disaster situations usually bring out the best in people. Communities join together to deal with difficult situations. The police and the army will be needed to help with the rescue and rebuilding.

9 Right - Long after a disaster has disappeared from the headlines, people are still coping with its effects. The damage may last many years. Health and water supplies may be destroyed. Rebuilding is very costly.

10 Wrong - Unfortunately the world's attention span is very limited. The media soon lose interest. You may be able to raise some funds for long-term recovery, but it will be difficult to make sure that people are not vulnerable to the next disaster.