

Tsunami: Schools Struggle to Get Classes Up and Running

Youthink turned to Carolyn Bartholomew, Executive Director for the [Basic Education Coalition](#), to learn about how the tsunami has affected schools and students in the stricken areas.

In Indonesia, Sri Lanka, and other countries assailed by the tsunami, the new school term has begun, but it is a term unlike any other.

Teachers and students perished in the disaster. The waves washed away or severely damaged schools, school records, furniture, books, educational materials and school uniforms. Many school buildings that withstood the tsunami now serve as housing for refugees or as morgues.

The countries are trying to assess the damage schools experienced.

But they are also trying to resume classes and help children get back to normalcy.

Officials report that in Aceh, Indonesia, 1,500 teachers are dead and 505 schools were destroyed, leaving 140,000 elementary and 20,000 junior-high students with nowhere to study. Sri Lankan authorities say that 150 schools were damaged or destroyed; another 244 schools are occupied by refugees. In the Maldivian Islands, hundreds of schools were damaged by the tsunami or are now only debris. Furniture, equipment and books have been completely washed away.

Humanitarian agencies and education experts agree that education is an important part of emergency relief and recovery.

Returning children back to school as soon as possible is one of [UNICEF](#)'s four fundamental steps for saving children in a disaster. The first three are: keeping children alive, caring for those separated from their parents and guarding against exploitation.

Education programs provide security, structure, a sense of normalcy and hope for the future. Schools are safe spaces and offer a support system for children, particularly traumatized and unaccompanied children. Lessons can even save lives, teaching valuable health or security information.

That's why organizations working in affected areas are making sure to help kids return to school.

[UNESCO](#) is mobilizing its teacher network to bring psychological and educational support to young people. It is establishing makeshift schools to continue with classes while school buildings are being

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rebuilt.

In refugee camps, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are establishing areas for children to learn and play-and be children for a while.

It will be years before the region fully recovers. For the children of the "tsunami generation," education is going to be important for their short-term survival as well as their future.

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