



January 2020

## Supporting children's mental health during disaster and traumatic events – resource list

The thoughts of everyone at Emerging Minds and the National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health (NWC) go out to bushfire-affected communities across Australia.

The scenes over the last few days and weeks have been harrowing, with many people in shock and suffering at this time.

In the midst of this difficult fire season, it is important to remember that children are particularly vulnerable both physically and emotionally to the impacts of disasters or traumatic events. Even if children have not been directly exposed to the event, they may well still be impacted by scenes depicted in the related media coverage.

The NWC team have put together a collection of evidence-based resources from the Centre's [Community Trauma Toolkit](#), developed together with the Australian National University's Australian Child and Adolescent Trauma, Loss and Grief Network. These materials focus on supporting children and families during and in the immediate aftermath of a disaster.

If you're a first responder, GP, journalist, health or social worker, parent or carer, an educator or community leader, these resources will help you respond appropriately, in the most challenging of circumstances.

### Resource list

#### Psychological First Aid for children and adolescents

Ensure safety	Keep calm	Connect with others	Encourage self-efficacy	Have hope
				
Remove the child from, or reduce exposure to the threat of harm.	Provide a calm environment, away from stressful situations or exposure to sights, sounds and smells of the trauma event.	Keep families together and keep children with their parents or other close relatives whenever possible.	Help families to identify their own strengths and abilities to cope.	Reassure the child that their feelings are normal, but assure them that things will be ok.



Psychological First Aid is an internationally accepted strategy that can be used anytime, but is most widely used in the first hours, days and weeks following a traumatic event. Here are some practical ways that Psychological First Aid for children can be applied:

**Ensure safety:** Don't leave children unattended. Where possible, protect them from witnessing further traumatic sights and sounds. Protect them from media or other people who want to talk to them and are

not their family or part of the emergency response.

**Keep calm:** Speak in a low, calm voice. Tell children they are safe (when this is the case). Answer questions honestly, but without any frightening or graphic details. Reassure them that they have you and other adults looking out for them and that they will be with their families soon.

**Connect with others:** Reunite children with their families and loved ones as soon as possible following a disaster or traumatic event. If this is not possible, try to keep in touch by phone or online (e.g. private messaging).

**Encourage self-efficacy:** Where possible, encourage children to meet their own needs, for example, if they are agitated consider redirecting them to a calming strategy: 'Hey I'm feeling a bit anxious, what do you think could help calm me down? Slow breath -what a great idea! Let's try it together'

**Have hope:** Be mindful of children's needs and reactions and be responsive to them. Be gentle and accept all responses. Don't tell them to 'be good', 'be brave' or 'stop being silly'. Some children may require physical touch for reassurance such as hugs, holding hands, or leaning on you.

[View resource](#)

### **Video: Supporting children in the immediate aftermath of disaster**

Disasters and traumatic events are by nature, very stressful and it is normal to feel overwhelmed. However, it is important to remember that even after facing a disaster, most adults and children will cope and recover over time with the right help and support. This short video looks at how to support children immediately after a disaster or traumatic event.

[Watch video](#)

### **Fact sheets: Trauma responses in children by age**

This series of fact sheets will step you through typical trauma responses in children that may be seen:

- [at birth to 24 months,](#)
- [2 – 4 years of age;](#)
- [and 5 – 12 years of age.](#)

### **Podcast: Communities in the immediate aftermath of a trauma**

This episode features Kate Brady, a Churchill Fellow and National Recovery Advisor at Australian Red Cross, about what happens in a community during and after a traumatic event. Kate discusses the difference between natural disasters and community traumas, what communities might experience, and how families, communities, and first responders can all respond to and support children in their recovery.

[Listen to podcast](#)

### **Factsheet: Traumatic events, the media and your child**

Media coverage during times of disaster or traumatic events is important: it can provide those who are affected with news and information about where to go, how to get help and when it's safe to return to their homes. Media coverage is also prolific and can often focus on the most frightening aspects/visuals of the event. Adults need to be mindful of how much exposure children have to coverage on TV, radio or the internet. This factsheet will help adults to support children to cope with the media coverage they see of a disaster or traumatic event.

[Access fact sheet](#)

## **Practice paper: Keeping children and families in mind – Guidelines for media professionals reporting on disaster or community trauma events**

This practice paper highlights the need to keep children and families in mind when reporting on disasters and traumatic events. This practice paper contains guidelines intended to showcase best practice and to help protect children, families and also media staff. They are designed to sit along existing media guidelines and are supporting by the following fact sheet.

[Access paper](#)

### **Fact sheet: Journalists and media staff as parents and carers**

Journalists and media staff who are parents need to be aware of their own self-care needs, and the needs of their children and families. This fact sheet offers a number of strategies for talking with children about work and looking after one's self during and after reporting on disasters.

[Access fact sheet](#)

### **Fact sheet: Keeping children and families in mind when reporting on disaster and community trauma events**

Following a disaster or community trauma event, the media acts as a crucial source of up-to-date factual information. In this fact sheet, the five strategies of Psychological First Aid provide a practical guide for journalists and media staff to have positive and supportive interactions with children during this time.

[Access fact sheet](#)

## **Emerging Minds Community Trauma Toolkit**

The above materials form part of the Emerging Minds Community Trauma Toolkit. The Toolkit contains resources to help and support adults and children before, during, and after a disaster or traumatic event. It will help you understand some of the impacts of disaster and how you can help lessen these impacts.

Emergencies and disasters are extremely stressful and it is normal to feel overwhelmed. Children, even infants, can also be affected. They depend on the adults around them for safety and security, and will need reassurance, care, and opportunities to share their feelings. The resources in this toolkit provide a starting point for you to help children navigate the different stages of a disaster.

[View the full Toolkit here.](#)

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### **Emerging Minds**

*Emerging Minds is dedicated to advancing the mental health and emotional wellbeing of Australian infants, children, adolescents and their families. The organisation leads the National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health, delivered in partnership with the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), the Australian National University (ANU), the Parenting Research Centre (PRC) and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP).*

*Emerging Minds develops mental health policy, services, interventions, training, programs and resources in response to the needs of professionals, children and their families. We partner with family members, national and international organisations to implement evidence-based practice into the Australian context. Our resources are freely available at [www.emergingminds.com.au](http://www.emergingminds.com.au).*

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