

Queensland Floods

Parent and Carer Tips

Tips for supporting children and teenagers following a disaster

Children and teenagers show a wide range of reactions to trauma. A young person's reaction following a natural disaster such as a flood will depend on factors such as their age, past experiences and other things that are going on in their lives. Disasters, such as floods, can threaten a young person's sense of safety and predictability. Many young people will show some emotional and behavioural changes, such as fear, sadness, difficulty concentrating, separation anxiety, sleep problems and/or other behavioural problems. With time and the support of parents, family and friends, most children and young people will recover from the negative impacts of the floods without professional help.

There are several things that parents and carers can do to help children and adolescents to cope after a natural disaster.

How parents and carers can help

Maintain routines

- Maintain your child's, and family's, daily routines as much as possible – for example, going to school, seeing friends, and doing usual hobbies, activities and chores. Getting back to usual routines is not always easy with the disruption that disasters can cause, but this is a helpful way for children to develop a sense of 'normality' and safety.
- Participate in enjoyable activities together as a family.

Help your child and teenager to feel safe

- Reassure your child that he or she is safe and cared for.
- Limit your child's exposure to television or other sources of information about the floods.
- If your child wants to, talk with him/her about the floods.
- Encourage your child to express how they are feeling – this is part of the healing process.

- Children and young people can become frightened about things they don't fully understand. Answer your child's questions about the floods in an open and honest manner. Children will differ in how much information they want, take your child's lead when deciding how much detail to share.
- Don't be afraid to tell your child if you can't answer all of their questions.

Make sure you are coping

- After a disaster, parents/carers are more easily able to help their child if they are taking good care of themselves.
- Therefore discussing your own disaster reactions with another adult, such as a trusted friend, family member, or GP may make it easier for you to talk with your child about their disaster experiences and reactions.

Common trauma and stress reactions and when to seek help

Trauma reactions can include

- development of new fears
- seeming more irritable, worried, or sad
- seeming dependent or clingy
- 'going backwards' with skills – such as speech or toileting, or a return to other behaviour from a younger stage of development
- challenging or 'acting out' behaviour, or attention-seeking
- poor school performance
- problems paying attention
- unexplained aches or pains
- loss of interest in activities
- reliving the traumatic experience through drawings or play
- becoming very concerned about the possibility of future disasters or about 'bad things' happening
- nightmares
- seeming jumpy or on the lookout for danger.

Getting help

General practitioner / Doctor

Parentline
13 22 89

Kids Helpline
1800 551 800

Headspace (12-25 years)
1800 650 890

Australian Psychological Society
Find a psychologist service
1800 333 497

NQ Connect
1300 059 625

North West Remote Health
1800 799 244

North West Hospital & Health Service
07 4744 7103

When to seek professional help

Many young people will experience some of the above reactions immediately after a natural disaster, and for most, these will reduce with time.

However, some young people will go on to develop more persistent mental health problems such as posttraumatic stress disorder, depression and/or anxiety, and require additional support and treatment.

Parents and carers are in a good position to monitor early trauma and stress reactions, provide support as suggested above, and seek professional advice as needed.

If you notice that your child continues to experience significant trauma or stress reactions for more than two weeks, or if your child is very distressed or unable to participate in usual activities, talk to your GP about this. There are effective treatments for children and adolescents who experience difficulties after a traumatic event.

**Contact the Queensland Floods
Practitioner Advice Line on Mental Health**
for access to FREE and confidential
information, advice and resources.



Call 1800 260 618
Monday - Friday | 9am - 4pm (AEST)



Email
phoenix-floods@unimelb.edu.au



Online
www.phoenixaustralia.org/advice