

Supporting your child through natural disasters.

A letter from the Ballina School Counselling team.

Dear Parents and Carers,

Following a natural disaster any reaction can be normal. No two children will experience or respond to a natural disaster in the same way. Your child may rely on you for comfort and support whilst navigating their reactions to the current natural disaster. We understand that you know your child better than anyone, and believe you are in the best position to provide support. However, finding a balance between supporting your child and caring for yourself and others can be hard. Which is why we wanted to share with you some key tips on how to best support your child over the coming days, weeks or even months.

What you can do to help:





- **Make sure you are coping.** Taking good care of yourself and discussing your own disaster reactions with a trusted adult or trained professional may make it easier for you to respond to your child's needs.
- **Provide Stability.** Maintain regular routines where possible. This includes regular eating, sleeping, schooling and exercise schedules.
- **Offer Reassurance.** Provide a calm and supportive environment where you listen and talk to them about their worries or concerns. It can help to ask your child directly what their concerns, questions and worries are. Always reassure them that they are safe and cared for.
- **Normalise their Response.** Encourage your child to express how they are feeling. This is part of the healing process. It is important to acknowledge and respect your child's emotions. Your child may find a sense of relief in knowing that their reactions are normal.
- **Limit Exposure.** Limit your child's exposure to television or other sources of information about the disaster.
- **Encourage Calmness.** Use coping strategies to assist children to reduce their worries such as blowing bubbles, using stress balls, deep breathing exercises and relaxation activities.
- **Create a Shared Story.** When your child is calm and feeling safe you can talk to them about how natural disasters are random and unpredictable. Answer your child's questions about the disaster 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. Provide your child with accurate, though age-appropriate, information about the situation. This will prevent them from creating their own narrative that could potentially be more confronting than reality.
- **Saying Goodbye.** Give your child the chance to talk about what they miss and what they have lost. Acknowledge that what has happened is not 'fair'. Involve your child in choosing new belongings, or perhaps remember old toys and other treasured possessions with a 'goodbye ceremony'.
- **Promote Smiles.** Organise fun activities with family and friends where possible. Ask your child to help decide on these.

If you notice any of the following changes in your child and require expert assistance, please reach out to your school. We want you to know you are not alone and we are here to help.

- Withdrawn
- Dependent or clingy
- Sleeplessness, nightmares
- Complaints about feeling sick, headaches, tiredness
- Development of new fears
- Seemingly jumpy, or on the lookout for danger
- Difficulties concentrating
- Difficulties with organisation
- Poor school performance
- Increase in absences
- Difficulties in relationships with peers and others
- lack of interest in usual sporting activities/ games

These are normal reactions to *abnormal* events, however help is available.

Additional sources of support for you and your family:

-  Phone 1300 1300 52 or send a message to info@parentline.org.au
-  Phone 1800 551800 or web chat and resources at www.kidshelp.com.au
-  Phone 13 11 14 or web chat and resources at www.lifeline.org.au
-  Phone 1800 011 511, operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Please don't hesitate to contact your school counsellor/psychologist at the school if you are concerned about your child, to make an appointment for your child, or if you need any further support.

Yours sincerely,

Southern Cross Distance Education School Counsellor