



Caring for children during extreme events

SOURCE: Adapted from Australian Psychological Society

Information for parents and caregivers

Impact of extreme events on children

People cope with uncertainties in different ways and there is no one 'standard' pattern of reaction. Children are not always able to express complex feelings in the same direct way that adults do and therefore do not often show the same reactions to stress as adults. It is therefore very important to look out for changes in children's behaviour that suggest they are unsettled or distressed.

Reactions in these uncertain times may result in changes to children's normal behaviour such as:

- ✚ Changes in their play, drawing, dreams, or spontaneous conversations
- ✚ Regressive behaviour — children behaving younger than they normally do
- ✚ Nightmares
- ✚ Anxiety about sleeping alone
- ✚ Trouble getting to sleep
- ✚ Irritability or anger
- ✚ Tantrums
- ✚ Fussy eating
- ✚ Withdrawing
- ✚ Wanting to stay close to a parent
- ✚ Problems concentrating at school

Children are usually very resilient and for most children these reactions will gradually reduce over time with the support of families.

How you can help your children in these uncertain times

Children need comfort, reassurance and support, and to know that they are safe and are being looked after. Try to spend time with your children and provide them with plenty of affection through cuddles and hugs. Sometimes children can better express their feelings through play than through words, so make time to play with them. Try to establish daily routines, for example routines around mealtimes, bedtimes, exercise and schooling if working from home.

Find out what your children know in case they have mistaken ideas or facts and correct any misconceptions. Keep your responses appropriate to the age of your child and also appropriate to the child's level of understanding and emotional maturity. Young children often need reassurance more than facts.

Listen to your children's concerns. Listen closely to what they are asking or saying, and think about whether they are looking for factual information, or if the questions are expressing anxiety about the current situation. Let them know that you understand how they feel.

Monitor how much your children are being exposed to media stories. Children can become hypervigilant and overwhelmed by watching repeated images on the television and it is best to try to shield them from the media. Be aware they may be listening from another room.

Be aware of how you talk. Adults need to be conscious of the presence of children when discussing their own concerns. It is a good idea not to let children overhear adult conversations about worrying things if they cannot join in at their own age or stage of development.

Seeking further help

Cathedral College Wangaratta has a dedicated Wellbeing Team, including Counsellor and Chaplains. The Wellbeing team may be contacted via email;

School Counsellor: June Stamp jstamp@cathedralcollege.vic.edu.au

Chaplains; Cathy Carden ccarden@cathedralcollege.vic.edu.au

Rev. David Jones djones@cathedralcollege.vic.edu.au

It is important for your child to maintain routines and opportunities for relaxation and mindfulness. In times of uncertainty, find opportunities to highlight positivity.