

# Supporting kids' wellbeing and resilience before, during and after disasters.

A guide for local governments, service providers and community groups.



**Children, especially infants and very young ones, are particularly vulnerable during disasters as this is a critical time in their physical, emotional and cognitive development.**

Their early experiences, including any cumulative adversity, shape how they respond and can have long term mental health, educational, developmental and physical health impacts.

Disasters don't just threaten immediate safety, they disrupt routines, relationships, learning, and a child's sense of stability. With the right support, communities and services can help children feel safe, connected, and resilient through these challenging times.

## Key principles

**Be child centred but family focused**

Children are not just small adults, their needs require particular attention. Emphasise families and caregivers, because how caregivers respond strongly influences children.

**Physical and psychological safety are critical**

Physical safety (evacuation, shelter, protection), and psychological safety (connection, predictability, routine) are both critical.

**Focus on strengths and child agency**

Build on strengths that communities, families and children already have (resilience, coping skills, knowledge). Recognise children's perspectives and agency.

**Child wellbeing requires everyone**

Integrate multiple actors in your community response including health, education, emergency services, early years, community organisations, local government.

**Integrate into local plans**

Consistent planning and review of practice in local disaster planning will build capacity in the community over time.

## Key practices (before, during, after)

### Before / Preparedness

- Include children and families in disaster planning, and do this in culturally and developmentally inclusive and safe ways (local government, school, community).
- Develop emergency plans that explicitly include provisions for infants/young children, young people and their caregivers (evacuation, sheltering, health, safe spaces). Recognise the importance of animals for kids.
- Provide resources that help children and families understand disasters, know what to expect, and build coping skills to respond with confidence.
- Map vulnerabilities (which communities and populations are most at risk) so resources and interventions can be directed where they are most needed.
- Train workforce (teachers, health workers, emergency services) in child-centred psychosocial support, while also prioritising their own wellbeing.
- Ensure infrastructure and services remain safe and reliable, such as secure school buildings, resilient health services, and dependable communication systems.

### During / Response

- Safety is the first priority. Ensure physical protection, shelter, access to food, and essential health care.
- Maintain routines and consistency where safe and possible, as schooling and childcare provide familiarity and normalcy.
- Keep families together whenever possible. Support caregivers, and ensure quick contact and reunification if separation occurs.
- Protect children who are unaccompanied or at risk and ensure child protection systems remain active and responsive.
- Provide clear, age-appropriate communication. Help children understand what's happening in a way that feels safe and manageable.
- Collaborate across services, including health, mental health, emergency, social services, to ensure coordinated response and avoid duplication or gaps in care.

### After / Recovery

- Provide ongoing mental health and psychosocial support for children and caregivers, with early identification of those who may need extra help.
- Restore education and school engagement routines, plus other community and peer supports.
- Consider ways to ease disaster-related stress for adults and caregivers—such as providing housing, financial assistance, and other practical support.
- Evaluate what worked best and integrate these child-disaster-lessons into your disaster management plan.
- Support community stakeholders to assess the trauma response in children at appropriate intervals.

### Helpful resources



**Birdies Tree**  
(0-8 year olds)



**headspace**  
(12-25 year olds)



**ABC Kids**  
(0-8 years old)



**Outback Futures**  
Download flyer + extra resources



**Emerging Minds**  
(0-12 year olds)



**Australian Breastfeeding Association**  
(infants and toddlers)



**Phoenix Australia**  
(0-18 year olds)

This project received funding from the Australian Government.



**Australian Government**  
National Emergency Management Agency



**FRRR**  
Foundation for Rural  
Regional Renewal



Delivered by



**Thriving Queensland Kids Partnership**  
connect • catalyse • learn