Supporting the recovery of children and adolescents following a natural disaster
For Parents and Carers

Natural disasters impact people both directly and indirectly. Children and young people are particularly vulnerable and can respond to traumatic events such as a natural disaster in a variety of ways. Parents and carers play a significant role in children and young people’s lives and provide support, advice and guidance throughout the healing process.

This brochure provides information about accessing specialised external support for your child to complement the support provided in kindergarten or school settings.

Working in partnership: kindergartens, schools and families

There are a variety of support staff within kindergartens and schools. These include early childhood professionals, teachers, Student Welfare Coordinators, Student Support Services Program staff, Primary Welfare Officers, and school nurses. Each can provide support, advice and information about children and young people who are experiencing difficulties or having problems.

Student Support Services Program (SSSP) staff in schools

SSSP staff provide specialist support and assistance to children and young people. If needed, SSSP staff can work closely with you, your child and community based health and support services to ensure that your child has access to appropriate levels of support at the right time. Some children and young people may require an additional level of support from mental health professionals that can be accessed outside the kindergarten or school setting. SSSP staff can provide you with information on the range of supports that are available to your child outside the kindergarten or school setting.

Allied health professionals

Allied health professionals can provide support to your child outside the kindergarten or school setting. Allied health professionals include social workers, psychologists, mental health nurses, occupational therapists and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers with specific mental health qualifications.

Who may benefit from some specialised support?

Each child or young person will have a unique response to a traumatic event. There are differences in the length of time it takes individuals to begin their recovery process and there is no ‘one way’ that children and young people will respond and work through feelings such as sadness, anger, loss and/or grief. There are some behaviours that children and young people may exhibit that are concerning and should be discussed with your GP, your Maternal and Child Health Nurse, or your child’s kindergarten or school welfare staff. These include:

- Feeling anxious, fearful or distressed
- Experiencing physical discomfort, including problems eating, sleeping or toileting
- Having difficulty concentrating or behaving impulsively
- Nightmares or bed-wetting
- Behaviour problems (such as aggression or anger) that disrupt your child’s development or adjustment at home or at school
- Having difficulty with relationships within the family and/or with their friends
- Refusing to attend kindergarten or school
- Anxiety about safety or separation from you.
Children and young people accessing support from allied health professionals

To access specialised support for your child from an allied health professional, you need to get a referral from your GP. Make an appointment to discuss your child’s needs with your GP, who will work with you and your child (if appropriate) to develop a Mental Health Care Plan. Your GP can also advise you of any other relevant services available in your local community.

The following website lists Community Health Services and other Community Health Program funded services in Victoria: http://www.health.vic.gov.au/communityhealth/service_provider/community_health_directory.htm

Telephone support services

There are also a number of telephone support services available to provide support, counselling, information and referrals, including:

- Parentline 13 22 89
- Kids Helpline 1800 551 800
- Maternal and Child Health Line 13 22 29
- Lifeline 13 11 14
- Mensline 1300 789 978
- Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement 1300 664 786
- Relationships Australia 1300 364 277
- Directline (drug & alcohol support) 1800 888 236
- Youth Substance Abuse Service (drug and alcohol support for young people aged between 12 and 21) 1800 014 446