



# Helping children and young people cope with crisis

Information for parents and caregivers



the power of humanity



This information booklet is designed to help parents and caregivers understand common reactions by children and young people to challenging or overwhelming experiences. It also provides practical information to help respond to the needs of the child.

Some words of encouragement:

- no-one knows your child as well as you do
- family is the most important support network for children and young people
- getting help can be a good idea.

**Following a crisis, a little early help can save a lot of heartache.**

See the suggestions at the back of this booklet.



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Cover (top to bottom): Australian Red Cross/Conor Ashleigh, Michael Torres, Conor Ashleigh.

This booklet uses the term 'parent' when referring to the primary caregiver/s.

This may also include family members or other close or trusted adults.

The words 'child' and 'children' are used when referring to all young people aged 0-25 years.

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# 1

# Stress and trauma

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Trauma can happen after a single event or experience.

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Trauma can also occur if stress builds up over time.

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**But remember, not all stressful situations cause trauma.**

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Sometimes children have experiences which are very demanding, challenging or overwhelming.

**They include:**

- sudden natural disasters – floods, fires or storms
- slow onset natural disasters – drought, land denigration, environmental change
- incidents – vehicle or other accidents, deaths, relationship breakdowns
- violence – fights, war, domestic violence, abuse
- serious illness or other medical conditions
- community events – pandemic
- threats that attract intense media attention – terrorism, climate change.

**Trauma can happen when someone:**

- thinks they could have died
- witnesses or experiences a tragic, terrifying, or overwhelming event
- experiences a big shock or is very scared
- is overwhelmed or feels like they have no control
- has a number of challenging experiences over time
- experiences discrimination
- has family members who have experienced trauma (intergenerational trauma).

**Trauma arises from emotional and psychological injury and:**

- can prompt concerning behaviours
- can produce strong feelings (extreme ups and downs)
- can include frightening thoughts, sensations and painful feelings
- may interfere with social and cognitive development.

**Chronic stress may damage physical, social and psychological functioning and development. It can happen when a child:**

- lives with stress over a long period of time
- has little or no escape or relief from the cause of stress e.g. drought, illness, violence, discrimination, racism or pandemic
- is required to 'grow up' prematurely and take on greater responsibilities and make adult decisions about their lives and the lives of loved ones
- is required to balance school work with increased responsibilities at home and/or meet expectations beyond their capacity
- is conscious of not bothering others with their challenges, and 'bottles up' emotional reactions.



Australian Red Cross/Conor Ashleigh



Australian Red Cross/Diina Perera

**Some things to consider:**

- some children will be fine – they won't have any concerning reactions at all
- most children recover with time and the appropriate understanding and support
- reactions may occur during or long after an event
- some children grow from their experience and discover new strengths or skills
- how parents recover and manage their own stress is the strongest indicator of how a child will cope.

**There are many ways to help children cope with stress and change. Refer to the table at the back of this booklet.**

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Some children will be fine. Others may develop a new sense of resilience and strength.

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Recovery can be quick and straightforward. Occasionally, it can be more complex and take longer.

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Everyone reacts differently and recovers in their own way. There is no right or wrong.

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# 2

# Loss and grief

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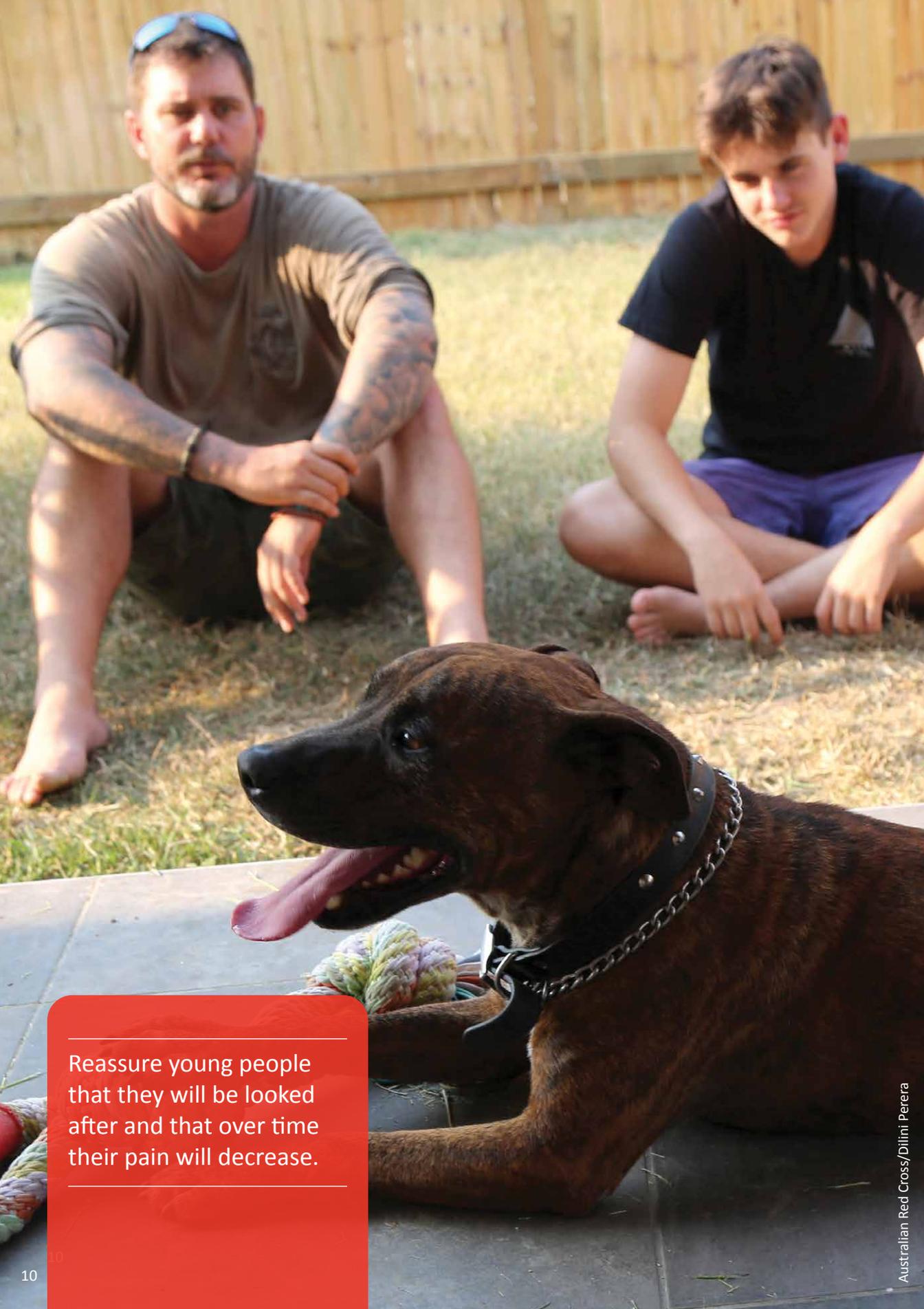
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Grief is not an illness that needs to be cured.

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It is the normal, healthy reaction to loss.

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Reassure young people that they will be looked after and that over time their pain will decrease.

It's normal for people to grieve when they lose someone or something important to them. Like adults, children express grief in different ways, it can involve intense feelings such as:

- sadness, pain and hurt
- yearning
- uncertainty or confusion
- fear
- anger
- disappointment
- guilt.

**Sometimes, when grieving, young people can become:**

- lazy or apathetic
- aggressive
- withdrawn
- easily irritated.

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"I thought my three-year-old wouldn't understand when her grandfather died but she noticed he was missing. We explained that he had gone away and looked at photos, telling her: 'We're here with you, I'm here with you'."

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"My 19-year-old son planted a tree in memory of his mate who was killed in a car accident. My 22-year-old daughter had a BBQ with friends. They found their own way to keep his spirit alive."

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"It's hard seeing your cattle getting skinny... all you see are ribs now. And like with horses, I've had my horse since like...six and dad said he's sorry but it's not going to last until Christmas, ." <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UNICEF Australia, 2019. The Drought Report.

### **Coping with loss and grief:**

- assure children and young people it's normal to feel sad and upset. Let them know it might last for a while but they will feel better in time
- assure them that they are not alone
- share positive memories and treasured mementos
- ask them if they would like to undertake a suitable ritual or commemorative action. Provide support for them to write a letter, visit a special place together or plant a tree
- where possible, allow children to make choices, rather than making decisions for them. Support young people in making decisions
- maintain open conversations with children. Adolescents and young people may not want to talk, but it is important to be open with them when they do
- stress, trauma and grief can be isolating, and some crises mean you have to move away or physically isolate your family from others
- maintain and encourage meaningful relationships that support your family, through phone calls, video calls or online support groups
- acknowledge that disruption to cultural or spiritual practices, including connection to Country, can exacerbate stress or grief.

### **According to their age and capacity to understand:**

- let children and young people know how you are feeling, without overwhelming them
- be alert to children creating false ideas about what 'might' have happened
- be honest.

### **You might also visit a GP or other health professional.**

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"I held it together for ages and when I finally cried in front of the kids, they gave me great comfort. It helped them to help me. Made them feel stronger. They needed to see that everyone feels heavy and sad sometimes."

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"The loss of our horses and dogs was hard for everyone. The kids felt guilty that they couldn't save them. We reminded them that they were wonderful carers of those animals and focused on the good memories."

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3

# Reactions

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Parents' recovery has a big influence on how young people recover.

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Give plenty of hugs and affection to little children. Let them be near you.

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# Reactions: Infants to 5 years

## Some common reactions include:

- returning to early behaviours like thumb-sucking, bedwetting or being scared of the dark
- forgetting new skills, manners or self-care behaviour
- sleep difficulties including night terrors
- changes to eating patterns and dietary habits
- separation difficulties, not wanting to be alone, clinging to familiar people or things
- being easily startled, hyperalert or hyperactive
- challenging behaviours
- feeling unsafe and fears of a crisis event happening again
- facial expressions of fear
- crying, whimpering or screaming.

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“We had donated clothes after the fires, because we lost everything. My two-year-old would undress after I dressed her in the mornings. Someone suggested I wrap the ‘new’ clothes up, like a gift. It worked. My little one needed to feel a sense of ownership over her belongings again.”

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“It was hard to know if our grandson’s tantrums were normal two-year-old behaviour or trauma. We tried to be fair and consistent in our discipline and made sure he got plenty of sleep. It went away after a few months.”

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“Our little son cried a lot after the cyclone. I would show him the sky, speaking calmly to let him know he was safe. Years later, he still gets upset with bad weather but it’s much less and as soon as he knows he’s safe, he’s okay again.”

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“My five-year-old went back to sucking her thumb after a car accident. We tried to make her stop, which only made her feel worse. The main thing is to not get angry or upset about it – she stopped after a couple of months when she felt ready.”

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# Reactions:

## 6 to 11 years

Children between six and 11 years-of-age may experience any of the previous reactions. They may also:

- become depressed, anxious, naughty or aggressive
- be easily annoyed or irritable, have angry outbursts or start fights
- become quiet, and perhaps withdrawn and isolated around friends and family
- feel guilty
- feel numb emotionally
- complain of unfounded physical problems
- behave like a younger child
- be overactive or hyperactive
- struggle to pay attention, listen and remember
- lose interest or not perform well at school.

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“Dad gave me the job of cleaning the shed. I was 11 then. He had heaps of other stuff to do. I liked helping and building something new.”

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“Our 11-year-old got anorexia in the year after the disaster but this was because of other issues, not just the fires. Through our GP, we found a psychologist and later linked up to a clinic to support her and get her healthy again. I guess an event like that can be a catalyst for other issues.”

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“My seven-year-old was distressed about things he’d lost, so replacing them helped. Some things were exactly the same, some were different.”

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Family is the most important part of a child's life. Adults give them security and confidence. Make time to be a parent for them.

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Allow time for kids to play with friends and adults.

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Include children in discussing plans for any future disasters, this will help them feel ready and more in control.

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Involve children with tasks and decision making during long-term events, such as drought, and focus on a positive future.

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Encourage teenagers to do things they enjoy, either with mates or alone.

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Recognise that they are going through significant developmental changes.

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# Reactions:

## 12 to 18 years

Young people between 12 and 18 years-of-age may experience the previous reactions (0-11 years). They may also:

- feel guilty about the event or being unable to do more during the event
- become depressed
- become overactive or overinvolved
- isolate themselves from family and/or peer groups
- avoid reminders of the event
- have flashbacks, nightmares or difficulty sleeping
- regress in standards of self care
- over eat/under eat
- have difficulty with school or work
- struggle with family and peer relationships
- exhibit antisocial behaviour (like being disrespectful or destructive)
- take risks or behave dangerously
- use or abuse drugs or alcohol
- behave in sexually inappropriate ways.

Young people may not have formal networks of support, particularly if they have left school and not gone on to tertiary education. They may rely on other support networks, such as peers, sporting clubs, gaming or online groups.

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“My 17-year-old was embarrassed about having flashbacks and nightmares after the accident. She said “That only happens to babies”. I found internet videos from kids who survived September 11 and she saw that the flashbacks and stress is a normal thing, for any age.”

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“My daughter was diagnosed with depression nine months after the fires. It lasted about three years, in varying degrees. We got help from doctors. What else worked? Writing down feelings and not giving her ‘special’ attention, especially where her friends were concerned.”

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“I was 15 when our house was flooded. It was scary but sort of exciting. I helped clean up and now I know how to get ready for floods.”

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“Our 13-year-old developed migraines and started playing up at school, which was out of character. For the physical stuff, the doctor suggested mild pain relief and plenty of water. For the other stuff, we tried not to get angry but we did uphold that rudeness was unacceptable. I guess we tried to treat him as a ‘normal’ teenager going through angst.”

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# Reactions:

## 18 to 25 years

Young adults may experience any of the reactions listed on the previous pages.

Other reactions may include:

- feeling a strong sense of responsibility for injury to loved ones and damage to property
- increased stress levels due to work or study commitments
- difficulty finding routine again and managing previously 'normal' tasks
- laziness or apathy
- anger or annoyance at loss of independence or privacy
- questioning one's purpose in life
- difficulty prioritising and/or managing work, study and social demands.

Young adults will have important relationships beyond the immediate family to nurture. They may not have formal networks of support, particularly if they have left school and not gone on to tertiary education. They may rely on other support networks such as peers, sporting clubs, gaming or online groups. Some may also have financial, workplace or other responsibilities and may be parents themselves. All children and young people, regardless of their age, need good and consistent examples, especially when life is disrupted. It is important to ensure they have people their own age to turn to for extra support.

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"Our 18-year-old's accident left him in a wheelchair. Of course he's changed but he's slowly finding a new identity, I guess. That kind of happens when you're in your twenties anyway. The best things for him have been support groups with other injured kids. We make sure his mates come over at least once a month. And music, he's always loved his music. It's on all the time."

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"My house wasn't burnt down, and nobody I know was killed but I was a bit messed up after the fires. We had to evacuate three times and it was really stressful. When it's really hot or when there's smoke around, I talk to mum about it. She gets it."

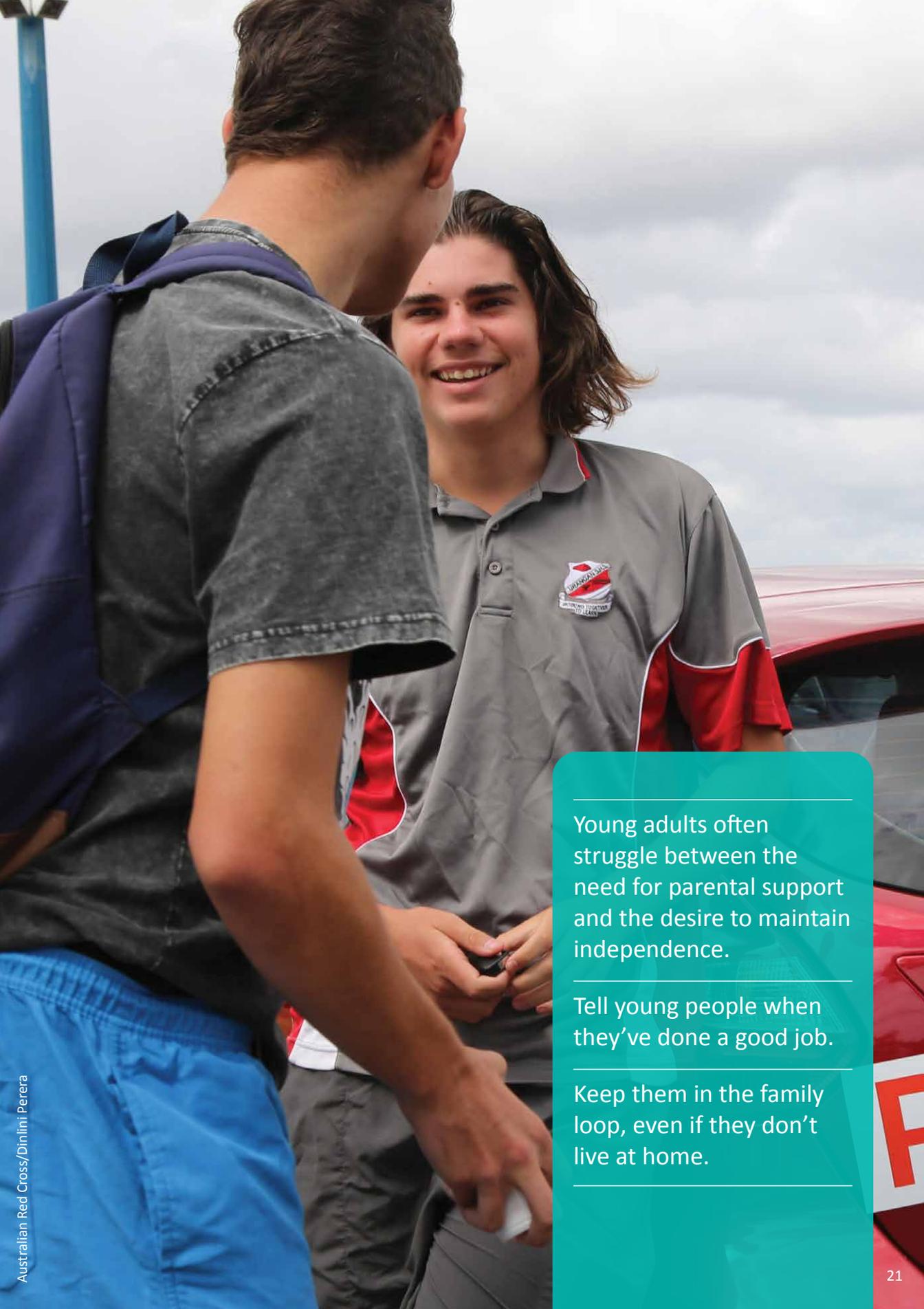
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"I was 20 when my town was destroyed. After a couple of weeks, I felt like I was going crazy. I went on a long road trip and drove all day to my cousin's house. They didn't ask any questions, just took me in. I stayed for two weeks, until I felt okay to go home again. I was stronger after a little time on my own."

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"Our kids weren't living here when the fires hit. But they were affected because we were affected – this is where they grew up, it's their home too. We kept them in the loop by emailing photos of the old house and the new one, sending texts about the builders. It was so good to stay connected."

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Young adults often struggle between the need for parental support and the desire to maintain independence.

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Tell young people when they've done a good job.

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Keep them in the family loop, even if they don't live at home.

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# 4

## Children living with a disability

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Connect with your support network, whether online or in person.

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Communicate with your child in a way they can understand.

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There are a range of ways to support children and young people living with a disability and/or additional needs during or after a crisis.

- communicate with your child about what has happened and is happening in ways they can understand
- provide them with opportunities to communicate what they're experiencing or what they experienced
- maintain normal routines and environments as much as possible
- encourage but do not force them to share their emotions
- encourage and answer questions
- use your support team as much as possible to help monitor your child and help you look after yourself
- connect with other parents and carers online or in person.

# 5

# Sleep

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Reduce distractions at bedtime. Turn off phones and computers.

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Sometimes it's okay to stop what you are doing to rest. Sleep is more important than many things.

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Many people have trouble sleeping after a crisis or when dealing with chronic stress. Good sleep is a very important part of the healing process.

**The following tips are relevant to you and your children.**

**Before sleep:**

- avoid stimulants (caffeine, energy drinks, alcohol and cigarettes) in the afternoon and evening
- switch off computers, TVs, mobile phones and other electronic distractions at least an hour before bed
- do relaxing activities that help ease you into sleep (reading, meditation, listening to soft music, breathing exercises or taking a warm bath before bed)
- try drinking warm milk or herbal tea (without caffeine)
- burn energy and increase tiredness at night by doing physical activities during the day
- write lists of activities or tasks for the following day, as a way of ending the day and planning for tomorrow.

**Consider the sleeping environment:**

- make the bedroom a safe, peaceful and comfortable place
- wear loose, clean and comfortable clothing
- keep the lights soft before sleep and the room dark and quiet throughout the sleeping period
- aim to maintain routines or rituals, sing good-night songs and ensure children have their comforters
- maintain a regular pattern, go to bed and wake up at the same time each day
- help regulate the body's natural clock by getting some exposure to sunlight soon after waking
- experiencing nightmares or interrupted sleep.

**Some things to remember:**

- these are normal reactions to trauma and usually pass with time
- if children are scared of sleeping, recognise their fears and let them know they are safe
- stay with them if necessary, repeating soothing phrases or singing quietly can help
- make sure they have their favourite teddy, blanket or comfort item
- create a state of calmness with deep breathing or quiet talking
- oversleeping, or not wanting to get out of bed, may also occur
- if you are seriously concerned, or if sleep problems continue for more than six weeks, seek advice from a doctor or child health specialist.

# 6

# Looking after yourself

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Allow time to reflect and think about how you would like to move forward.

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First take care of yourself, in order to take care of your children.

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Children’s reactions are often influenced by their parents’ reactions to an event or crisis and how they manage stress. When parents look after their own health and wellbeing they are better able to look after their children.

**Some tips:**

- get good rest. Sleep provides more energy, clearer thinking and helps you be more understanding
- watch your diet and physical health. Manage your intake of caffeine, alcohol, drugs and medication in the best interests of your child
- look after your relationships. Communicate with people close to you. Lean on them if you need to. Accept or ask for their support if it helps you or your children
- do things that make you happy. As much as possible, take part in activities and interests that make you feel good. Do these activities with and without your children
- stay connected with workmates, neighbours and other groups. Don’t become isolated, as an individual or as a family
- be mindful that people in the family, including partners, may have different reactions, priorities and child rearing patterns and values.

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“My sister stayed with us after the fires. She helped with cleaning and cooking and drove me everywhere. She was positive, strong and caring with the kids. I look back and see how good it was to have her looking after the kids. In many ways, she was looking after me too.”

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“I couldn’t sleep at night, so I tried mini breaks during the day. I just sat down and got comfortable for a minute, took a deep breath. Just a few moments to stop and breathe helped me relax.”

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- be kind to yourself. Acknowledge that your parenting or caring for others will be impacted. You might find it more challenging than it was before, and your situation might look and feel different to those around you
- connect with things that are familiar to you and your family, even if activities are in new locations or traditions have to be modified. Routines can help establish a sense of stability
- acknowledge that recovering may take up a significant period of your life, and that of the children in your care. It can help you prioritise the little things that are important to your family.

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“After the house was damaged, it took its toll on our relationship. My wife was exhausted, stressed. I was too. We didn’t talk for a while. It took time and a lot of patience.”

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“I was so caught up with the kids, I didn’t think about what had happened to me. How did the fires affect my life, me as a person? It was a hard question to face – I was so angry about it. Just admitting that to myself cleared my head and helped me be a not-so-angry mum.”

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# 7

## Helping them cope

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Help them regain some control and order in their lives. When appropriate, let them choose meals, pick out clothes or make other decisions in the household.

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Moving home after a crisis or challenge may require extra time to adjust to new surroundings.

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Coping with crisis can be isolating and disorientating. Encourage them to keep seeing friends when possible, and ensure that you do too.

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### **When communicating with young people:**

- ‘tune in’ to them and take their concerns seriously
- be consistent, keep communicating, share information
- talk about what is happening now. This helps children feel connected and avoids feelings of isolation or misunderstanding.

### **Assure children and young people:**

- you love them
- the event is not/was not their fault
- it’s okay to feel upset
- they are safe and explain that you will do your best to take care of them.

**How parents recover and manage stress is the strongest indicator of how a child, teenager or young person will cope.**

### **Tips for tricky conversations:**

Often parents are unsure how to speak to their children about difficult conversation topics.

- let children lead the conversation and ask questions. Be open to their concerns
- start with shorter answers, but always ask if there is anything else they want to know
- be honest, but age appropriate
- acknowledge if it is or was scary and focus on reassuring them
- acknowledge there are things they can’t control, but focus on what can be controlled (helping others, preparing for next time, taking time out, planning things to look forward to)
- encourage your child to talk about their feelings, thoughts and concerns. Accept their fears and feelings. Don’t dismiss their issues as trivial
- acknowledge concerns that are real and correct any misconceptions.

## Helping children and young people cope

### Do:

- listen to what they have to say, answer their questions
- help children understand what happened. Be honest. Use information based on well-sourced facts, not rumour or hope
- reassure them about the future
- involve children in chores and responsibilities as soon as they can cope, without overburdening them
- try to keep normal routine (reading before bed, eating dinner together, watching TV together)
- encourage play and fun
- make time for the family to be together and enjoy each other's company, laugh
- be open about your thoughts and feelings, children will be aware of them anyway
- allow emotions to be shared in the family in a way which does not overwhelm
- let children cry, hang around you or the house, be clingy or physically close
- thank and praise children when appropriate.

### Don't:

- demand that children be brave or tough
- expect them to 'get over it' or 'get on with it' quickly
- expect them to take on responsibilities beyond their capability at that time
- get angry if they show strong emotions
- force them to tell their stories or probe for personal details
- make promises you might not be able to keep
- bottle things up – try to express emotions openly, without overwhelming children
- pretend that you are okay.



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If you can't keep normal routines, try to make new ones together, like going for a walk, helping to prepare a meal, or playing a game.

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Children have great powers of recovery and resilience when understood and supported.

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# 8

## The media

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Many young people depend on social media like Instagram, Snapchat or Twitter, to stay connected with their friends.

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Being socially connected is a good idea.

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Be mindful over overexposure.

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Remind them that not everything posted online is true.

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The media can worry and upset young people during times of crisis or ongoing challenges. Overexposure to TV, newspaper, social media and internet coverage during and following an event can be overwhelming and disturbing.

**Things to consider:**

- not all media reports, mainstream and social, are based on facts
- sounds and images can be upsetting
- repetition of images and messages can be overwhelming and may create a false sense of danger or reality
- news reports can sensationalise or exaggerate events
- children and young people interpret images and news through their understanding of the world. For example, they might recognise a damaged car on TV and think the car belongs to someone they know.

**Where possible:**

- limit your child's access to news and all types of media
- talk to teenagers and young people about the importance of limiting exposure, and only sharing information from reputable sources
- ask your child what they have seen or heard about the event
- clarify any misunderstandings
- avoid discussing news stories with other adults within the hearing of kids.

# 9

# Suggested activities and coping strategies

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Parents and carers whose children have been affected by emergencies, disasters and challenging times contributed to the following list of ideas. Other suggestions came from child trauma experts.

It's important to help children and young people to find the activities which *they* enjoy. These activities may also be run by other adults or older siblings to provide release time for parents and primary caregivers.

To ensure the safety and ongoing wellbeing of young people in your care, Red Cross advises that parents carry out their usual parenting care and style. Observe your children and set up boundaries around these activities, as you normally would.

Some activities may not be appropriate in all circumstances. In a drought context looking after animals or the garden might be a source of stress and trauma for young people. Similarly, organised sport may be cancelled if the physical environment is impacted, or challenging for families to access because of distance.

Ages are intended as a guide only. Finding a suitable activity will depend on the individual child. Adult supervision and assistance may be required in some activities depending on children's ages and skills.

## Suggested activities and coping strategies

Activity	Age	Benefits	Ideas
Animals	2+	<p><b>Playing with or caring for animals encourages young people to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>empathise</li> <li>assist creatures that may be vulnerable</li> <li>adopt a sense of responsibility</li> <li>increase attention skills</li> <li>improve interactions with humans</li> <li>increase self-esteem</li> <li>reduce loneliness.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>pets</li> <li>looking after stock</li> <li>horse riding</li> <li>visiting a farm, zoo or aquarium</li> <li>looking after pets of others.</li> </ul>

Activity	Age	Benefits	Ideas
Art	3+	<p><b>Participating in creative arts activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• allows children to create, destroy and recreate</li> <li>• is tactile, soothing and calming</li> <li>• can be private or shared</li> <li>• can provide sense of relief, 'getting feelings out'</li> <li>• can be fun</li> <li>• can be spontaneous or involve planning</li> <li>• encourages non-literal thinking</li> <li>• allows symbolic communication</li> <li>• can help to document the event.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• painting</li> <li>• drawing</li> <li>• making (clothes, jewellery, sculpture, etc)</li> <li>• photography</li> <li>• video (digital storytelling)</li> <li>• digital art</li> <li>• murals</li> <li>• animation</li> <li>• theatre and performing arts.</li> </ul>
Clubs/groups	5+	<p><b>Participating in club or group activities:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• allows children to 'belong' to a group</li> <li>• involves goal-setting</li> <li>• encourages collective sense of achievement</li> <li>• encourages social interaction</li> <li>• builds life skills</li> <li>• often involves mentoring by positive adult role models</li> <li>• can also encourage leadership opportunities for young people to guide others.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• play group</li> <li>• Scouts, Girl Guides, Rovers, etc</li> <li>• sport (pony clubs, swimming, hockey, etc)</li> <li>• music, dance or theatre group</li> <li>• volunteering groups</li> <li>• youth</li> <li>• holiday or after school clubs.</li> </ul>
Comfort items	0+	<p><b>Providing children with a familiar item or other comfort toy</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• can help them be more settled and able to cope</li> <li>• can assist with separation anxiety</li> <li>• provides a connection with their family and safety.</li> </ul> <p><b>If you have to leave them</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• encourage them to hold the item when they miss you or feel scared</li> <li>• remind them that you will return soon.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• an item they choose</li> <li>• a blanket</li> <li>• a scrap of material</li> <li>• a teddy</li> <li>• an item of clothing.</li> </ul>

Activity	Age	Benefits	Ideas
Computers or digital technology	5+	<p><b>Computers or digital technology are important for social connectedness (email, text, phoning, etc.) and can:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• help provide sense of control</li> <li>• be pleasurable and satisfying, especially quest or trivia games</li> <li>• be fun</li> <li>• encourage exploration, investigation and questioning</li> <li>• build skills and knowledge.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• computer or video games</li> <li>• LAN games</li> <li>• blogging</li> <li>• surfing the net</li> <li>• social networking</li> <li>• wii</li> <li>• artistic programs.</li> </ul>
Cooking	3+	<p><b>Cooking alone or together:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is rewarding (you can eat it!)</li> <li>• contributes to the household</li> <li>• is fun</li> <li>• is tactile</li> <li>• can be spontaneous or planned</li> <li>• involves learning new skills</li> <li>• encourages healthy living</li> <li>• allows risk-taking or experimenting.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• preparing meals for themselves</li> <li>• preparing meals for others</li> <li>• cooking classes</li> <li>• cooking parties with friends</li> <li>• BBQs.</li> </ul>
Games	4+	<p><b>Playing games helps because it:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• encourages family or social connectedness</li> <li>• is fun</li> <li>• can be challenging or easy</li> <li>• often involves problem-solving</li> <li>• encourages consistency and commitment to a cause, particularly in quest-based games.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• cards</li> <li>• board games</li> <li>• computer games</li> <li>• orienteering</li> <li>• ball games</li> <li>• puzzles</li> <li>• mind games (crosswords, sudoku).</li> </ul>

Activity	Age	Benefits	Ideas
<b>Gardening</b>	<b>3+</b>	<p><b>Gardening is an activity that:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• focuses on natural cycles of life, death and growth</li> <li>• helps reduce stress with fresh air and physical activity</li> <li>• provides sensory experiences (smell, sight, touch, sound)</li> <li>• is a meaningful or purposeful activity</li> <li>• may increase hope for the future</li> <li>• may increase self-esteem and self confidence</li> <li>• is a tactile opportunity to ‘get your hands dirty’.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• caring for existing plants</li> <li>• growing from seeds</li> <li>• planting small trees</li> <li>• planting herb, vegetable or flower gardens</li> <li>• pot plants or indoor plants</li> <li>• landscaping or rebuilding gardens.</li> </ul>
<b>Physical activity</b>	<b>5+</b>	<p><b>Sport and physical activities are known to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• reduce stress</li> <li>• increase alertness and calmness</li> <li>• promote discipline</li> <li>• build skills</li> <li>• help create tiredness at night (good for sleep)</li> <li>• build a sense of achievement or success</li> <li>• encourage goal setting through healthy competition</li> <li>• involve celebrating wins and/or collectively dealing with loss.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• team sports</li> <li>• martial arts</li> <li>• dance</li> <li>• swimming and water sports</li> <li>• walking, running</li> <li>• stretching, yoga or pilates</li> <li>• gym or outdoor workouts</li> <li>• cycling, mountain biking</li> <li>• horse riding.</li> </ul>
<b>Preparedness</b>	<b>4+</b>	<p><b>Preparing for an emergency and looking to the future:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• helps children feel safer</li> <li>• empowers children to feel more in control of their environment</li> <li>• planning together helps families and groups bond</li> <li>• can be done at any time of the year.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• making an emergency kit</li> <li>• removing debris or fuel from around property</li> <li>• creating an emergency contact card</li> <li>• developing and practising a household emergency plan.</li> </ul>

Activity	Age	Benefits	Ideas
<b>Music</b>	<b>2+</b>	<p><b>Playing or making musical instruments:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• involves experimenting and learning new skills</li> <li>• allows for improvisation or free play</li> <li>• allows for emotional expression</li> <li>• may improve motor skills.</li> </ul> <p><b>Listening to music:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provides opportunity for movement and dance</li> <li>• provides opportunity for reflection through musical imagery</li> <li>• involves empathising, through lyrics, with the feelings and thoughts of others.</li> </ul> <p><b>In general, music:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is fun</li> <li>• can be therapeutic, relaxing and/or stimulating</li> <li>• is easy to access and suits many interests and age groups</li> <li>• provides opportunity for reflection through imagery and lyrics</li> <li>• allows for verbal and non-verbal communication.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• go to see live bands or performances</li> <li>• learn a new instrument</li> <li>• make simple instruments like rice shakers or saucepan etc</li> <li>• start a band with friends</li> <li>• have regular jam sessions</li> <li>• sit quietly and listen to music</li> <li>• create playlists for specific moods or events</li> <li>• play music-related computer games</li> <li>• explore music making software programs</li> <li>• karaoke or singing sessions.</li> </ul>
<b>Reading and watching books, film or TV</b>	<b>2+</b>	<p><b>Children reading or being read to:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• is non-strenuous and relaxing</li> <li>• can stimulate imagination and creativity</li> <li>• can increase concentration levels.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• magazines</li> <li>• books</li> <li>• online articles, blogs, journals, etc</li> <li>• TV and DVDs (with age appropriate ratings)</li> <li>• audio books</li> <li>• listening to or watching the stories of others</li> <li>• comics.</li> </ul>

Activity	Age	Benefits	Ideas
Relaxation techniques	3+	<p><b>Getting help from professionals or guides is a good way to learn relaxation techniques that are:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• calming, allow the mind to rest</li> <li>• useful for general stress management.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• guided meditation</li> <li>• yoga</li> <li>• massage</li> <li>• deep breathing</li> <li>• labyrinths.</li> </ul>
Scrap booking	5+	<p><b>Making a scrapbook is helpful because it:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• keeps records of treasured or important moments</li> <li>• can help young people accept events from the past</li> <li>• provides opportunities for personal or group reflection</li> <li>• is a form of expression.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• creating books for personal memories</li> <li>• creating books for others</li> <li>• celebrating special moments (birthdays, anniversaries etc).</li> </ul>
Unstructured play	To 8 or 9 years	<p><b>Free unstructured time for children to just 'be children':</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• allows natural expression of thoughts and emotions</li> <li>• allows children to build, destroy and rebuild</li> <li>• is fun.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• hide and seek</li> <li>• cubby houses</li> <li>• dress ups</li> <li>• chasing games</li> <li>• sand play</li> <li>• toys</li> <li>• indoor and outdoor play</li> <li>• water play</li> <li>• imaginative games.</li> </ul>
Volunteering	5+	<p><b>Helping others is often personally rewarding because it:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• allows young people to contribute to the recovery process</li> <li>• often involves mentoring by positive adult role models</li> <li>• encourages social connectedness</li> <li>• promotes a sense of involvement and empowerment.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• school groups</li> <li>• youth groups</li> <li>• working with charities</li> <li>• working with emergency services</li> <li>• working with community groups.</li> </ul>

Activity	Age	Benefits	Ideas
Writing	7+	<p><b>Creative or factual writing helps because it:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• stimulates imagination and creativity</li> <li>• can be private or shared</li> <li>• helps rationalise thoughts</li> <li>• helps verbalise or describe emotions</li> <li>• can provide sense of relief, 'getting feelings out'.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• keeping a journal or diary</li> <li>• letter writing</li> <li>• blogging</li> <li>• story writing</li> <li>• song writing</li> <li>• magazines or newsletters</li> <li>• poetry.</li> </ul>



Australian Red Cross/Dilini Perera

# 10

# When and where to get help

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There is no harm in seeking advice.

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Tapping into local services is a good idea.

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Most children and young people adapt and grow through challenging or overwhelming experiences with care and support from family, friends and teachers. For a range of reasons, some children (and their families) will need assistance along the way from people skilled in understanding reactions and the journey of recovery.

**Sometimes, a crisis will mean that your normal supports are more difficult to access or no longer available. In those circumstances online support groups might help you connect with people in similar situations.**

**You know your child best. Listening to, observing and understanding your child is the best support you can provide.**

**You can:**

- keep your child’s teacher informed and ask for feedback on their recovery
- be open to observations from close friends, family or other adults in your child’s life
- try phone helplines or websites (see next page)
- get advice from a GP, nurse or other child and adolescent health professional.

**If the following reactions continue, in you or your child, for more than six weeks, you may want to seek professional help.**

**Get advice if any family member:**

- cannot perform normal routines
- develops new symptoms
- experiences persistent emotional or physical symptoms
- experiences persistent nightmares, poor sleep or flashbacks
- experiences persistent accidents or illness
- struggles with family, school or work relationships
- experiences a loss of memory and/or concentration
- performance suffers at school, work or home
- has persisting accidents or illnesses
- loses faith in themselves or the world
- develops feelings of hopelessness, despair or even suicide
- increases consumption of smoking, drinking or drugs
- develops sexual problems.

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**Please note:** *six weeks is a general time guide for most cases. If you are concerned about someone in your care, don’t wait to seek help.*

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There are a number of resources designed to support families. As many provide similar information, we suggest approaching a source you trust. The following is a national guide to some of the informed resources, remember to check services in your local area.

Agency	Resources
<p><b>Australian Red Cross</b>  <a href="http://www.redcross.org.au/get-help/emergencies/resources-about-disasters/resources-for-parents">www.redcross.org.au/get-help/emergencies/resources-about-disasters/resources-for-parents</a></p>	<p><b>For children:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After the emergency kids booklet (Ages 5-8)</li> <li>• Get ready! kids booklet.</li> </ul> <p><b>For young people</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After the emergency podcast and website to help people cope with emergencies.</li> </ul> <p><b>For adults:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coping with a major personal crisis booklet</li> <li>• RediPlan booklets</li> <li>• Parenting: Coping with crisis</li> </ul>
<p><b>Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement</b>  <a href="http://www.grief.org.au">www.grief.org.au</a></p>	<p>Information and support for people experiencing loss and/or grief.</p>
<p><b>Australian Child and Adolescent Trauma, Loss and Grief Network</b>  <a href="http://www.earlytraumagrief.anu.edu.au">www.earlytraumagrief.anu.edu.au</a></p>	<p>For people involved in the care of children/ youth and interested in the potential impact of trauma, loss and grief experiences.</p>
<p><b>Better Health Channel</b>  <a href="http://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au">www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au</a></p>	<p>Many healthy eating, exercise and relationship tips, for all ages.</p>
<p><b>Beyond Blue</b>            1300 22 4636  <a href="http://www.beyondblue.org.au">www.beyondblue.org.au</a></p>	<p>Information and coping strategies for all ages across a range of mental health topics, including depression, anxiety and recovery from crises.</p>
<p><b>Birdie's Tree</b>  <a href="http://www.childrens.health.qld.gov.au/natural-disaster-recovery">www.childrens.health.qld.gov.au/natural-disaster-recovery</a></p>	<p>Illustrated stories, therapeutic games and resources to help children aged 0 - 5 years understand different emergencies and work through their feelings.</p>
<p><b>Emerging Minds</b>  <a href="http://www.emergingminds.com.au/resources/toolkits/community-trauma-toolkit">www.emergingminds.com.au/resources/toolkits/community-trauma-toolkit</a></p>	<p>A toolkit containing resources to help and support adults and children before, during and after a disaster traumatic event.</p>

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**Agency****Resources****headspace**

[www.headspace.org.au](http://www.headspace.org.au)

Mental and health wellbeing support, information and services to young people and their families across Australia.

**Kids Helpline**

1800 55 1800

[www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au)

Telephone and online counselling for young people aged 5-25.

**Lifeline**

13 11 14

[www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

24-hour telephone crisis support. For more information or to download mental health and suicide prevention resources, visit Lifeline's website.

**Parentline**

1300 30 1300

[www.parentline.com.au](http://www.parentline.com.au)

Information, advice and a listening ear for parents with any concerns about their children or parenting.

**Phoenix Australia**

(Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health)

[www.phoenixaustralia.org/resources/disaster-resources](http://www.phoenixaustralia.org/resources/disaster-resources)

Mental health and wellbeing resources, including information about traumatic events.

**Reach Out**

[www.au.reachout.com/collections/dealing-with-stress-from-the-drought](http://www.au.reachout.com/collections/dealing-with-stress-from-the-drought)

A digital drought care package to help people cope and stay hopeful.

**Sesame Street**

[www.sesameworkshop.org/what-we-do/traumatic-experiences](http://www.sesameworkshop.org/what-we-do/traumatic-experiences) **and**

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXPzyQpTj50](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IXPzyQpTj50)

Support young children through tough times with a range of activities and videos from Sesame Street.

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[www.redcross.org.au](http://www.redcross.org.au)

**Red Cross National Office**

23-47 Villiers St  
North Melbourne VIC 3051  
Tel 03 9345 1800  
Fax 03 9101 5961

**ACT**

Red Cross House  
3 Dann Cl  
Garran ACT 2605  
Tel 02 6234 7600  
Fax 02 6103 0522

**NSW**

St Andrews House  
Level 3, 464 Kent St  
Sydney NSW 2000  
Tel 02 9229 4111  
Fax 02 8066 0854

**NT**

CASCOC Centre  
Level 1, 13 Scaturchio St  
Casuarina NT 0810  
Tel 08 8924 3900  
Fax 08 8989 2911

**QLD**

Humanity Place  
49 Park Rd  
Milton QLD 4064  
Tel 07 3367 7222  
Fax 07 3554 0486

**SA**

212 Pirie St  
Adelaide SA 5000  
Tel 08 8100 4500  
Fax 08 8432 0163

**TAS**

146 Elizabeth St  
Hobart TAS 7000  
Tel 03 6235 6077

**VIC**

23-47 Villiers St  
North Melbourne VIC 3051  
Tel 03 9345 1800  
Fax 03 9101 5961

**WA**

110 Goderich St  
East Perth WA 6004  
Tel 08 9225 8888  
Fax 08 6214 0418