

Queensland Centre for Perinatal and Infant Mental Health

# Recovering together after a natural disaster

## Supporting families with babies and young children

Stress caused by disasters can make babies and young children feel unsafe and insecure. Without help, they may continue to suffer stress from the disaster, which can affect their long-term emotional wellbeing. Babies and young children manage their feelings through relationships with parents and other caring adults. Strong relationships help babies and young children recover from disasters.

### Common physical and emotional reactions of babies and young children when distressed include:

- being clingy, whingey, whiney or unsettled – crying more
- seeming fearful, especially when parents are not present
- being more withdrawn, less responsive to parents and/or others
- eating less or more than usual
- having difficulty sleeping
- being hard to settle and soothe.

### Young children may also:

- be more easily frustrated and have more tantrums
- be more aggressive
- act out scary events in their play
- have nightmares
- lose previous skills or 'go backwards' e.g. toileting, walking, talking

If your baby or young child continues to experience any of the above symptoms and this causes you difficulty or concern, speak to a health professional.

### Things you can do to help your baby or child:

- spend time with them to help them feel safe
- re-establish regular routines as soon as possible
- play with your child – choose activities they enjoy like bubbles, play dough, reading, singing and dancing
- have fun together
- communicate with others who support your child
- help your child feel understood by labelling their feelings
- limit their exposure to TV and radio reporting on the disaster
- look after yourself.



## Always seek professional help if your baby or child:

- loses a lot of weight
- has an ongoing lack of appetite or is overeating
- lacks their usual energy
- appears watchful or worried
- loses interest in other people, doesn't make eye contact
- stops talking
- lacks curiosity in the world around them
- has ongoing sleep and settling difficulties.

## Where to get help

### Telephone and support services

#### General

- Your local doctor (General Practitioner)
- Lifeline (24 hrs) **13 11 14**
- 13 Health **13 43 25 84**
- beyondblue info line **1300 22 4636**
- Relationships Australia **1300 364 277**

#### Children

- Local Child and Youth Mental Health Service (Queensland Health)  
**childrens.health.qld.gov.au/mental-health-services**
- Parent Line (8am – 10pm daily)  
**1300 30 1300**



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#### Adults

- PANDA (Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Australia) **1300 726 306**
- Women's Health Queensland Wide Inc. **(07) 3216 0376**  
(outside Brisbane) **1800 017 676**
- Pregnancy, Birth and Baby Helpline (24 hrs) **1800 88 2436**
- Mensline Australia (24 hrs)  
**1300 789 978**

#### Online resources

- Information about natural disaster recovery **childrens.health.qld.gov.au/natural-disaster-recovery**
- Perinatal Anxiety and Depression Australia **panda.org.au**
- Information on depression and anxiety **beyondblue.org.au**
- Information on depression and anxiety **blackdoginstitute.org.au**
- Information about mental health and wellbeing **ontrack.org.au**
- Information about baby and toddler behaviour **zerotothree.org**
- Information about mothers and babies **mothersmatter.co.nz**
- Australian parenting website **raisingchildren.net.au**

## Contact us

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