

Queensland Centre for Perinatal and Infant Mental Health

Recovering Together after a Natural Disaster - Fire

Information and Activity Sheet for Families with Babies and Young Children

When natural disasters happen, nearly everyone has some reaction and emotional response, whether they are directly or indirectly affected. These emotions affect people of all ages, in different ways. They can occur immediately, later, or even long after the disaster has passed.

People may experience thoughts, feelings, physical reactions or behaviours that are intense, confusing and frightening. Such experiences are usually most severe during or straight after the disaster, then fade with time.

Babies and young children can easily become distressed by what is happening in the world around them. Anything that creates stress for the family can make babies and young children feel unsafe and unsettled. Without help, they may continue to be affected by the disaster, with long-term

impacts on their physical and social development and their emotional wellbeing.

Babies and young children manage their feelings through their relationships with parents and other caring adults. Parents and carers need to look after their own emotional wellbeing, so they can support their baby or young child.

Remember, **babies and young children communicate through their behaviour**. If your child doesn't seem to 'be themselves' or you have concerns about their behaviour, think about what their behaviour may be telling you.

You will find information and activities below. There is also a short story to read and talk about with your baby or young child.

Did you know that in times of stress, babies and young children may

- become worried, but may not have the words to tell you
- be clingy or whiney, have more tantrums, or seem more 'helpless'
- become aggressive
- cry a lot
- eat less or more than usual
- have difficulty sleeping or sleep more
- need repeated reassurance that they are safe
- want to be closer to their parents or carers and need more cuddles

Things parents and carers can do

- read the story over the page with your child and talk about the pictures
- name your child's feelings, for example "you seem to be feeling sad"
- try to spend time having fun with your child each day. Choose activities you know they enjoy, for example bubbles, games, reading
- replace special toys as soon as possible if they are lost or damaged. They can be a comfort
- answer questions honestly but don't give more information than is needed

- re-establish regular routines as soon as possible. Such routines are calming and create predictability
- avoid exposing your child to natural disaster coverage through television, radio or newspapers.
- try not to discuss worrying topics in front of babies and young children. They understand more than we realise

Things to remember

- talk with your child's childcare worker or other carer about how your child is feeling
- talk to a professional and ask for help if necessary
- stay in contact with others
- look after yourself

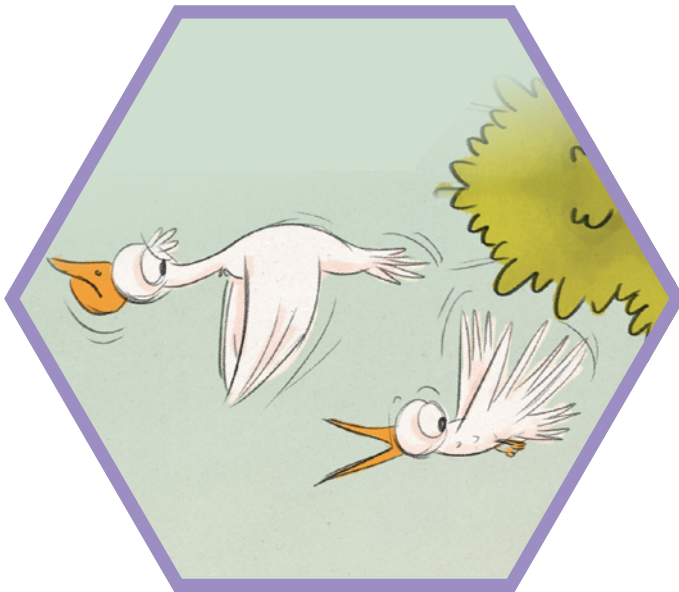
If you or your family are finding it difficult to cope with a natural disaster, professional help is available.

Where to get help

- Your local doctor (General Practitioner)
- Your local Child and Youth Mental Health Service
- Your local Child Health Service
- Lifeline (24hr) **131 114**
- *beyondblue* info line **1300 224 636**



Birdie and the Fire



One day, there was a fire in Birdie's forest. Birdie had to fly away to be safe from the fire.



There were hot flames and a lot of smoke. The fire-fighters used big hoses to spray the fire with water. Helicopters came and dropped water on the flames.



When the fire was over, Birdie's tree was all black. Birdie felt sad.



Helpers brought sticks to build Birdie a new nest. Birdie felt safe and happy again.



Developed by the Queensland Centre for Perinatal and Infant Mental Health (QCPIMH), Children's Health Queensland Hospital and Health Service, with the support of the National Perinatal Depression Initiative.
© Queensland Government February 2017

Contact us

31 Robinson Road | Nundah | QLD 4012

07 3266 3100

www.childrens.health.qld.gov.au/qcpimh

