

# HELPING KIDS THROUGH NATURAL DISASTERS

*by City Psychology*

During disasters children are going to have many mixed emotions depending on their level of development and understanding. Disasters like flooding, fires, tornados, earthquakes and cyclones scare adults so we have to make sure we are helping our children with those big emotions.

- 1** Children follow your emotional response. It is a good idea to take time to calm yourself before talking to your children - model good coping strategies
- 2** Once you have a plan, share the plan and emergency response with your children and let them know what might occur and that they will be safe
- 3** Give your children practical tasks to do in the lead up, depending on age, you may ask to help get food bag ready, clothes etc.
- 4** Let your children know it is normal to be scared and anxious.
- 5** Discuss emotions - children will be scared and have questions, make sure you discuss details based on their age group.
  - Under 5 yrs: will get mixed up on what is real or pretend but will know people around are sad or upset
  - Primary Age: will want to know more but get personally effected, refrain from watching news programs.
  - Over 12 yrs: Will understand and want to share in the feelings, thoughts but will still need your support.
- 6** Acknowledge any loss and destruction and assure children it's ok, we will clean up and rebuild. It may take time but it will be ok.
- 7** During this time of waiting for a disaster to pass or for it to be safe to go out doors... play with your children, read books, do things as a family and keep close to your children (where possible). This will help to take your mind off what's going on outside for a little while.
- 8** If you child is stressed they will need to slow their breathing so eye contact, and 5 deep breaths (in and out) count with them.
- 9** Most importantly, ahead to the warnings and do not let your children into flood waters to play. There maybe sewage, snakes, dangerous objects, other harmful animals, risk of diseases and risk of getting swept away. Lead by example...

Lastly most children will be fine. However, some may have big reactions requiring help. For children whose reactions continue or worsen after a week or more please seek a child psychologist.