

Trauma and the child

Every child responds differently to trauma. A child's response depends on a range of factors, including their age, experience of the trauma, the extent of disruptions to their daily life following the event, and how the adults around them respond.

The majority of children are resilient. In most cases, children will experience only minimal or short-lived distress. Some children even report feeling more confident or noticing positive changes following a natural disaster or community trauma.

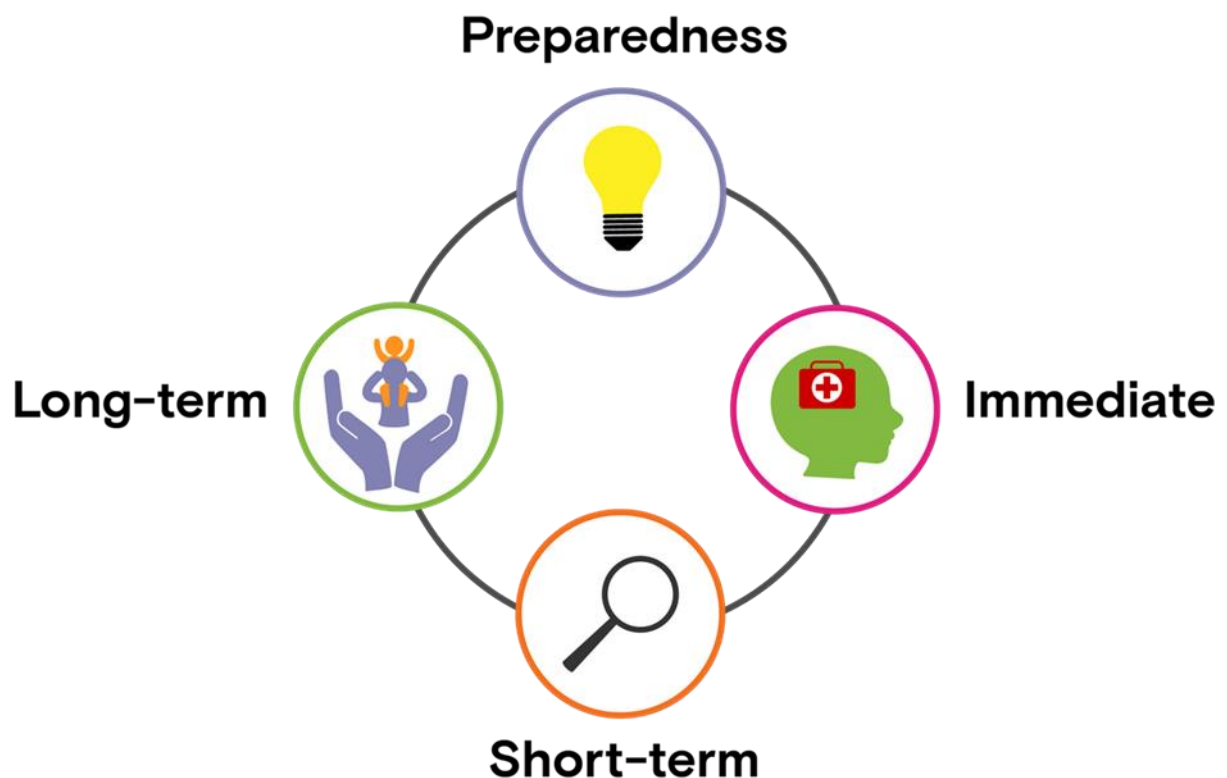
Some children may express a lot of different responses or one intense response immediately after the event but gradually return to their previous functioning over time.

Some children may experience an immediate traumatic stress response that can persist over time. These responses may intensify or develop into different emotional and behavioural problems.

Some children may appear resilient at first but display trauma responses later on.

As an educator, you are well-placed to support children who are doing well following a natural disaster or community trauma and those who may need extra support.

Natural disaster and community trauma timelines



A natural disaster or community trauma is made up of four stages:

- Preparedness
- Immediate aftermath
- Short-term recovery; and
- Long-term recovery.

Educators can use key strategies to support children through each stage.

Preparedness

Preparedness helps children to get ready for a potential disaster practically and emotionally. This can increase their confidence and ability to manage and recover from a natural disaster or community trauma and promote resilience.

Many people think talking about traumatic events with children, especially young ones, will scare or traumatise them. In fact, talking with children openly and honestly, and letting them know that you are prepared and have a plan, helps them to feel safer and more secure.

When talking with children about preparedness, it's also important to ensure you're prepared yourself. Think about what preparedness means for you, how comfortable you are talking about it, what these conversations mean for you personally, and how you might cope with any feelings that may arise during these conversations. Talk with your colleagues about what might come up for you, and if you're feeling nervous about having these conversations with your class, let them know so they can support you.

Professionals speak

In the following video, early childhood educators and other professionals speak about the importance of preparedness for children's wellbeing, and the strategies they've found useful.

Watch the video, then complete the reflection activity below.

Reflection

Use the notes area (to the right of your screen on desktop or at the bottom on mobile) to reflect on the following questions:

- Which (if any) of these strategies are you currently using in your work?
- Which would you like to implement in your learning community, and how might you go about this?
- What support would you need to implement these strategies, and from whom?

Resources

[Disaster preparedness, myths and programs that hold promise – Emerging Minds](#)
[How educators can prepare their students for a natural disaster – Emerging Minds](#)
[Preparing learning communities for the bushfire season – Be You](#)

Immediate

The immediate aftermath of a natural disaster or community trauma can be confusing, difficult and overwhelming for everyone. As an educator, you will personally know many of the children in your community. You may also be a parent or carer and may have different responsibilities pulling you in different directions.

Regardless of what has happened during an event, there are several principles you can use during and immediately afterwards to help reassure the children in your care. These principles are called 'psychological first aid' (PFA) and will be explored in more detail on the next screen.

Resources

[How educators can support children immediately after a disaster or community trauma – Emerging Minds](#)
[What educators can expect during and immediately after a disaster or community trauma – Emerging Minds](#)

Short and long-term recovery

It is important to remember that recovery is an ongoing process; there are no 'beginning' or 'endpoints'. The effects of a natural disaster or community trauma can stay with families and communities for months, even years, often resurfacing during similar events and anniversaries.

Learning centres are protective in nature. In the aftermath of a natural disaster or community trauma, they are commonly seen as a central point of support and safety. Children will often return to an early learning service shortly after a traumatic event. The return to friends, familiar adults and the learning community's routines can be very helpful for children. For many, this can be an exciting yet challenging time.

However, some children may also find it challenging to manage their emotions, concentrate on learning, and be away from their family. This course explores strategies you can use to support children's ongoing recovery, and to help them to re-engage in the learning environment.

Resources

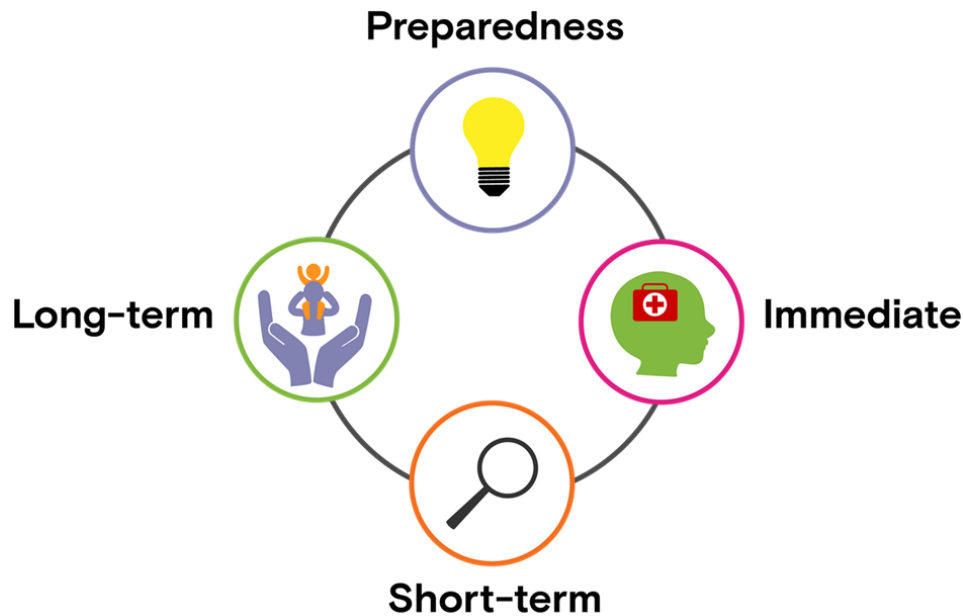
[What educators can expect in the short term after a disaster or community trauma](#) – Emerging Minds

[How educators can support children in the short term following a disaster or community trauma](#) – Emerging Minds

[What educators can expect in the long term after a disaster or community trauma](#) – Emerging Minds

[How educators can support children in the longer term following a disaster or community trauma](#) – Emerging Minds

Natural disaster and community trauma timelines



A natural disaster or community trauma is made up of four stages:

- Preparedness
- Immediate aftermath
- Short-term recovery; and
- Long-term recovery.

Educators can use key strategies to support children through each stage.

Preparedness

Preparedness helps children prepare for a potential disaster, practically and emotionally. This can increase their confidence and ability to manage and recover from a natural disaster or community trauma and promote resilience.

Many people think talking about traumatic events with children, especially young ones, will scare or traumatise them. In fact, talking with children openly and honestly, letting them know that you are prepared and have a plan, and involving children in preparedness strategies where appropriate, helps them to feel safer and more secure.

One key strategy is to make preparedness part of your curriculum. The Australian Red Cross RediPlan program offers free lesson plans to help educators teach students important emergency recovery information. The plans have been designed to assist children in reflecting on what has happened and to be aware of the feelings they may have after a disaster or community trauma. If students have not experienced a traumatic event, the lesson plans should be viewed as important preparation for recovery.

The Pillowcase Program also helps students in Years 3–4 (ages 8–10) to prepare for, cope with, and respond to an emergency. Delivered by Red Cross volunteers and staff, the one-hour workshop encourages children to be active participants in their own emergency preparedness by:

- helping them to understand and discuss the importance of being prepared
- offering strategies to prepare for the thoughts and feelings that may arise before, during, and after a disaster or community trauma
- teaching them what to pack in an emergency kit; and
- providing them with a pillowcase to decorate, take home and turn into their own emergency kit.

When talking with children about preparedness, it's also important to ensure you're prepared yourself. Think about what preparedness means for you, how comfortable you are talking about it, what these conversations mean for you personally, and how you might cope with any feelings that may arise during these conversations. Talk with your colleagues about what might come up for you, and if you're feeling nervous about having these conversations with your class, let them know so they can support you.

Professionals speak

In the following video, primary school educators and other professionals speak about the importance of preparedness for children's wellbeing, and the strategies they've found useful.

Watch the video, then complete the reflection activity below.

Reflection

Use the Notes area to reflect on the following questions:

- Which (if any) of these strategies are you currently using in your work?
- Which would you like to implement in your school, and how might you go about this?
- What support would you need to implement these strategies, and from whom?

Resources

[RediPlan preparedness program](#) – Australian Red Cross

[Pillowcase Program](#) – Australian Red Cross

[Disaster preparedness, myths and programs that hold promise](#) – Emerging Minds

[How educators can prepare their students for a natural disaster](#) – Emerging Minds

[Preparing learning communities for the bushfire season](#) – Be You

Immediate aftermath

The immediate aftermath of a natural disaster or community trauma can be a confusing, difficult and overwhelming time for everyone. As an educator, you will personally know many of the children in your community. You may also be a parent or carer and have different responsibilities pulling you in different directions.

Regardless of what has happened during an event, there are several principles you can use during and immediately afterwards to help reassure the children in your care. These principles are called 'psychological first aid' (PFA) and will be explored in more detail on the next screen.

Resources

[How educators can support children immediately after a disaster or community trauma](#) – Emerging Minds

[What educators can expect during and immediately after a disaster or community trauma](#) – Emerging Minds

Short and long-term recovery

It is important to remember that recovery is an ongoing process; there are no 'beginning' or 'end' points. The effects of a natural disaster or community trauma can stay with families and communities for months, even years, often resurfacing during similar events and anniversaries.

Schools are protective in nature. In the aftermath of a natural disaster or community trauma, they are commonly seen as a central point of support and safety. Children will often return to school shortly after a traumatic event. The return to friends, familiar adults and the routines that the school provides can be very helpful for children. For many, this can be an exciting yet challenging time.

However, some children may also find it difficult to manage their emotions, concentrate on learning, and be away from their family. This course explores strategies you can use to support children's ongoing recovery, and to help them to re-engage in the learning environment. The Australian Red Cross also offers targeted lesson plans to support recovery.

Resources

[Be You Bushfire Response Resource Pack – Be YouRed Cross recovery lesson plans – Australian Red Cross](#)

[What educators can expect in the short term after a disaster or community trauma – Emerging Minds](#)

[How educators can support children in the short term following a disaster or community trauma – Emerging Minds](#)

[What educators can expect in the long term after a disaster or community trauma – Emerging Minds](#)

[How educators can support children in the longer term following a disaster or community trauma – Emerging Minds](#)



A natural disaster or community trauma is made up of four stages:

- Preparedness
- Immediate aftermath
- Short-term recovery; and
- Long-term recovery.

Educators can use key strategies to support students through each stage



Preparedness

Preparedness helps young people prepare for a potential disaster, practically and emotionally. Talking with students openly and honestly, and letting them know that you are prepared and have a plan, will help them to feel safer and more secure. Involving young people in preparedness strategies can increase their confidence and ability to manage and recover from a natural disaster or community trauma and promote resilience.

One key strategy is to make preparedness part of your curriculum. The Australian Red Cross RediPlan program offers a series of free lesson plans designed to help teachers educate students about important emergency recovery information. They are best suited to Modern History, Geography, English or other Humanities subjects.

When it comes to talking with young people about preparedness, it's also important to make sure you're prepared yourself. Think about what preparedness means for you, how comfortable you are talking about it, what these conversations mean for you personally, and how you might cope with any feelings that may arise during these conversations. Connect with the leadership in the school around training and support services which can build your confidence and skills in this area. Additionally, if you are feeling nervous about having these conversations with your class, talking with your colleagues can help.

Professionals speak

In the following video, secondary school educators speak about the importance of preparedness for young people's well-being, and the strategies they've found useful.

Watch the video, then complete the reflection activity below.

Reflection

Use the Notes area (to the right of your screen on desktop, or at the bottom on mobile) to reflect on the following questions:

- Which (if any) of these strategies are you currently using in your work?
- Which would you like to implement in your school, and how might you go about this?
- What support would you need to implement these strategies, and from whom?

Resources

[RediPlan preparedness program – Australian Red Cross](#)

[Disaster preparedness, myths and programs that hold promise – Emerging Minds](#)

[How educators can prepare their students for a natural disaster – Emerging Minds](#)

[Preparing learning communities for the bushfire season – Be You](#)



Immediate

The immediate aftermath of a natural disaster or community trauma can be a confusing, difficult and overwhelming time for everyone. As an educator, you will personally know many of the young people in your community. You may also be a parent or carer and may have different responsibilities pulling you in different directions.

Regardless of what has happened during an event, there are several principles you can use during and immediately afterwards to help reassure the young people in your care. These principles are called 'psychological first aid' (PFA) and will be explored in more detail on the next screen.

After the emergency – a collaboration between the Australian Red Cross, triple j, Smiling Mind and other recovery experts – is a podcast and website offering advice to help young people who have experienced trauma. It is designed to be shared immediately after a disaster or community trauma but can also be used as part of a long-term recovery strategy.

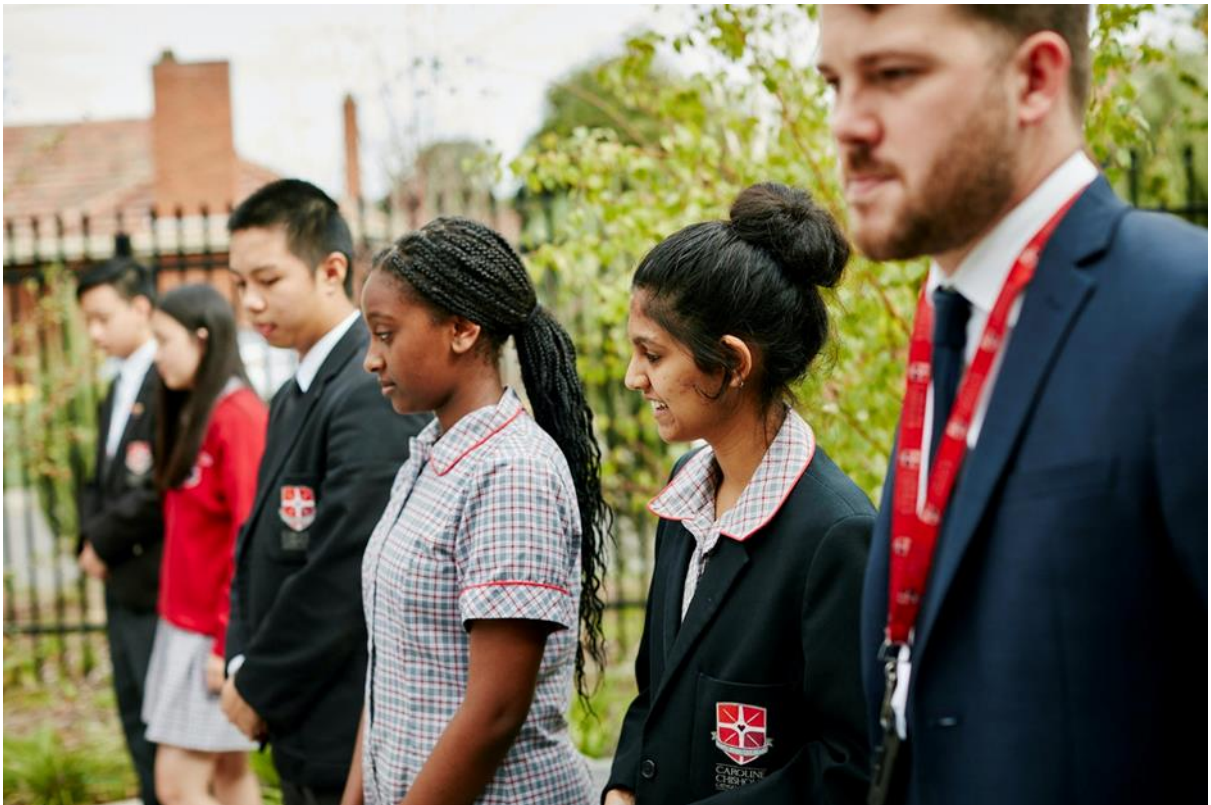
The other resources listed below from Emerging Minds have been created with younger children in mind, but the advice can also be applied to support young adults in the aftermath of a traumatic event.

Resources

[After the emergency – Australian Red Cross, triple j, Smiling Mind et al.](#)

[How educators can support children immediately after a disaster or community trauma – Emerging Minds](#)

[What educators can expect during and immediately after a disaster or community trauma – Emerging Minds](#)



Short and long-term recovery

It is important to remember that recovery is an ongoing process; there are no 'beginning' or 'end' points. The effects of a natural disaster or community trauma can stay with families and communities for months, even years, often resurfacing during similar events and anniversaries.

Schools are protective in nature. In the aftermath of a natural disaster or community trauma, they are commonly seen as a central point of support and safety. Students will often return to school shortly after a traumatic event. The return to friends, familiar adults and the school's routines can be very helpful for young people. For many, this can be an exciting yet challenging time.

However, some students may also find it difficult to manage their emotions, concentrate on learning, and be away from their family. This course explores strategies you can use to support young people's ongoing recovery, and to help them to re-engage in the learning environment. The Australian Red Cross also offers targeted lesson plans to support recovery.

Resources

[Red Cross recovery lesson plans – Australian Red Cross](#)

[What educators can expect in the short term after a disaster or community trauma – Emerging Minds](#)

[How educators can support children in the short term following a disaster or community trauma – Emerging Minds](#)

[What educators can expect in the long term after a disaster or community trauma – Emerging Minds](#)

[How educators can support children in the longer term following a disaster or community trauma – Emerging Minds](#)

NEXT PART