



## **Adults supporting tamariki following a natural disaster**

In the aftermath of Cyclone Gabrielle, it is normal for our tamariki and young people to feel anxious and worried.

### **Key messages**

- Children look to adults for support and safety
- Taking care of your own wellbeing needs, connecting with others and seeking support for yourself will help you support your tamariki.
- Take the time to listen to children, take notice and talk about what has happened together in a calm and supportive way
- Where you can, keeping negative reactions, or talk away from children will help foster a sense of safety
- The most supportive things you can do are:
  - Reassure, comfort, and listen to tamariki in your life
  - Re-establish routines, comfort objects/activities for children
  - Talk with children about working together to help with the recovery.

### **What to expect – common responses to natural disasters:**

- Grief is a normal response to an event of this magnitude. It's expected, and on its own doesn't require specialist input.
- Accept that grief reactions will vary, nothing is wrong.
- Respect the different ways people feel.
- Culture/religious beliefs may influence how people grieve.
- Children may only show their grief for short periods of time.
- Children will continue to play and engage in other positive activities, but their grief can be just as strong.

### **There may be a wide variety of reactions including:**

- fatigue, sleep problems, worry, anxiety
- accelerated heart rate, startle reflexes
- headaches, stomach upsets, breathing difficulties
- fear, shock, anger, sadness
- numbness, poor concentration, difficulty prioritising
- remembering images of recent events and scenes, which decrease over time.

**For most tamariki, physical and emotional reactions decrease overtime**



## **Ways adults can support tamariki**

In response to disaster and adverse event, it is normal for people to feel distressed due to significant disruption to their lives, and much of this distress will be driven by the need for basic supports. It is important to note that every organisation and helping person who assists is providing an important form of psychological support.

The immediate priority has been to respond to people's immediate safety needs and basic requirements, including shelter, food, water, and clothing through the welfare response. Health is complementing the welfare response by leading the mental wellbeing response.

As part of the mental wellbeing response, both Te Whatu Ora and Te Aka Whai Ora are in close contact with local mental health and addiction service providers and hauora Māori partners to understand damage sustained to facilities, impacts on service continuity, and response needs. The Ministry is meeting regularly with the national psychosocial response agencies to ensure we are working together.

Te Whatu Ora and Te Aka Whai Ora have been working with the Mental Health Foundation to adapt and expand the national All Sorts Campaign, which originated as part of the psycho-social response to the spread of COVID-19 in the community. It includes a range of targeted wellbeing materials and resources, messaging, a dedicated website and media campaign.

Youthline have secured assistance from Meta (Facebook) for advertising credits to promote support to geolocated youth over the weeks to come. This has Auckland, the Far North, Hauraki, Tairāwhiti, and Hawke's Bay.

There is a focused Māori psychosocial response. Te Aka Whai Ora have developed a mental wellbeing response plan with initial funding being reprioritised. The plan outlines national and regional approaches.

### **Connecting with others is important for everyone, including tamariki**

- In a time of uncertainty, it is good to continue with routines that are totally familiar. Build in games that are fun, and encourage social cohesion
- Increase and encourage physical activity. Physical activity decreases children's stress hormones and return focus to play and fun, even when times are hard.

### **Responding to questions and worries**

- Children may draw pictures, write, enact scenarios about the floods and its effects including those who may have been hurt, died, or currently have lost their kainga/home or marae.
- Children may want to talk or ask questions about what will happen when...? what if...?



# Te Mahau

- These are normal responses and is part of children trying to understand such a big event.
- You can help by listening and answering questions as well as continuing to encourage children to also focus on the positives and the future.
- You could discuss what the new repaired school / home might look like. What will remain the same and what may be different? You could have some art and writing sessions that focus on the future and or things that promote a sense of safety and protection.
- It is important to be honest and provide some practical ideas about how you can plan to keep safe and respond together.
- Your responses to questions will provide a greater sense of safety when they:
  - affirm the feelings/statements
  - provide reassurance
  - look to the immediate future, beginning with today and tomorrow

For example:

***“The news said that more rain is coming, is our house going to get flooded”***

*“Yes, there is more rain coming (**affirm**)*

*and people are working very hard right now together to help keep us all safe as we don’t know if there will be more flooding (**reassure**).*

*To help keep us safe, we’ve been asked to gather our important things just in case we might need to leave for a bit. We’ve got time to prepare so let’s think about the important things we will need to take. What ideas have you got about what to pack? (**look to the future**)*

## **Some tamariki will need extra support**

- Checking in more frequently with tamariki is a good way to understand the needs of tamariki and notice changes over time.
- If tamariki have been more directly impacted by the flooding including those dislocated, isolated from social connections and key adults, they may need some extra wellbeing support.
- The impact of this cyclone may also be hard for children who have already experienced tough times.

If you are worried about tamariki in your life, there is support available.

## **Useful resources are available**

Below are some useful resources that you may want to read through.



## Te Mahau

- The importance of explaining what is going on to children – talking to them and listening to them <https://www.kidshealth.org.nz/coping-natural-disaster>
- There is a wellbeing section in the All-of-Government fact sheets, which includes relevant resources updated to reflect psychosocial response:  
[20230228-Cyclone-Gabrielle-AoG-factsheet V.6-TCG.pdf \(civildefence.govt.nz\)](https://www.civildefence.govt.nz/20230228-Cyclone-Gabrielle-AoG-factsheet_V.6-TCG.pdf)