

## How parents and caregivers can prepare for a natural disaster

Australia is affected by many different types of disaster, including floods, bushfires and cyclones. Preparing yourself and your family ahead of time can really make a big difference to how you and your family respond and cope if there is a disaster.

Preparedness is important and helps you and your family members to work together to get ready practically and emotionally for a potential disaster. This can increase your confidence and ability to deal with a disaster, think more clearly and act according to the household emergency plan.

One of the most important ways you can minimise your children's stress and anxiety in an emergency situation is through coping well yourself.

### Practical and psychological strategies

You can start to prepare yourself and your family for a possible disaster by using both practical and psychological strategies. Psychological and physical preparation are closely linked, and both are important.

#### Practical preparation:

- Know your emergency contacts and keep them somewhere that's easy to find.
- Know where, how and when to get help.
- Know where you can get up to date, reliable information about the disaster.
- Gather facts and information about the threat.
- Access critical information about warnings and actions to take.
- Get the things together that you may need to take with you ahead of time. This could be passports, money, credit cards, important contacts, medicines and photographs.

- Sit down and talk with all members of the household, including young children, about your family emergency plan (e.g. what you might do if you have to stay in your home, and where you might go if you can't).
- Discuss your emergency plan regularly and keep it somewhere everyone can see.

#### Psychological preparation:

- Know about the risks and what you can do – this helps you to deal with disasters more effectively should they occur.
- Prepare yourself psychologically so that you feel more in control and are aware of what to expect.
- Know that feeling worried and stressed is normal, and that you can manage the stress and fear by learning how to identify feelings, bodily responses and thoughts, and having coping statements like, 'I can cope with this, we know what to do'.
- Learn breathing exercises to slow down breathing and keep calm.
- Help your children to identify and label their feelings. Teach them how to slow their breathing and calm down to help manage panic and overwhelming feelings.
- Listen to children's concerns and check in with any misperceptions or ideas and correct them.

### Talking to your children

Lots of people think that if they talk to their children about the potential threat of a disaster then they will scare or traumatise them. In fact, talking to your child openly and honestly, and letting them know that you are prepared and have a plan, helps them to feel safer and more secure. It will also help them to deal with the impact of a disaster if it does happen.

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# The High Five Model of Psychosocial Preparedness

This is a strategy that can help you to prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters.



## How to talk about disaster preparedness

Tell children that disasters can happen and if you as a family all know what to do, then it will help everyone keep safe. You will know what to do, when to do it and who can help you.

It's important for parents to stay calm and speak with confidence when discussing the family emergency plan as this will help reduce your child's worries.

Allow children to ask any questions or make comments they may have about disaster preparedness. This will help you to understand what needs clarification and dispel any misconceptions they may have.

Don't catastrophise or over dramatise. Assure children that with preparedness, things will be less scary and a lot safer.

Children may want to go over the ideas more than once depending on their age. Follow their lead, let them speak about it or ask more questions and check in if they are worried about something happening soon. If they are worried, let them know this is normal. Show acceptance of their feelings but let them know that you are not worried about anything happening yourself and your planning will help if it does.

For more information about emergency preparedness: <https://www.redcross.org.au/get-help/emergencies/resources-about-disasters/resources-for-parents-and-teachers>

## Involve children in disaster preparedness

There are benefits with involving your children in disaster preparedness.

Your child will:

- feel more able to deal with the threat, and feel safe and secure in knowing that you have a plan
- be able to tell you what is most important for them to take with them in the event of a disaster
- know that even if you are affected by a disaster, your family will use its resources to work together.

## Don't forget the pets

Pets are members of your family too, so thinking about what you will do with your animals is an important part of disaster preparedness.

In the event of a natural disaster, most local councils will have somewhere that you will be able to take your animals where they will be safe. Knowing where this is and thinking about how you will get your animals there should be part of your disaster preparedness plan. Telling your children that you also have a plan in place for their favourite pet will also be reassuring for them.

You may be lucky and never be affected by a disaster; however, if you are affected and you are prepared, the physical and psychological outcomes for you and your family are likely to be much more positive.

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