Queensland Centre for Perinatal and Infant Mental Health

Recovering Together after a Natural Disaster - Drought

Information and Activity Sheet for Families with Babies and Young Children

Unlike other natural disasters that last for a limited time, a drought may continue for years and can have a significant physical and emotional impact on individuals, families and communities.

Living through a drought may cause distressing thoughts, feelings, physical reactions or behaviours. These can affect people of all ages, in different ways, and can increase in severity over 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, the emotional effects of drought can have 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**

Queensland Government

Birdie and the Drought

One summer, there was no rain for a long, long time. The ground was hard and dry. Birdie could not find any worms to eat.

Birdie had to leave her home. She flew a long, long way, and arrived at a waterhole. Some other birds helped Birdie find worms to eat.

But Birdie felt sad. She missed her home and her old friends.

One day Birdie met Mr Frog. Mr Frog helped Birdie make new friends. Birdie felt safe and happy again.

Contact us

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