

How to support children during... **Emergencies**



1. Hear them out

Make time and hold space for tamariki to share how they're feeling. Don't dismiss their worries or underestimate their ability to ask tough questions, propose smart solutions, and teach you something too. It's ok that we might not have all the answers. Have open and honest conversations with children. Some children may express themselves through drawing, writing or play.

Some children may react to trauma by becoming quiet and withdrawn, while others may act out or become hyper-alert. Children may also regress in behaviour, such as bed wetting, thumb sucking or being easily upset. Children can easily pick up on the mood of adults. Model calm behaviour, comfort them through hugs and help manage their fears by telling them about the ways different people will keep them safe.

2. Understand that children will respond differently

In an emergency like the floods, I feel safe when I can stay home with Māma and have hugs to keep me brave.
Sophie, 5



What helps me during an emergency is knowing the entire world is with me as my family 'vasudhaiva kutumbakam.'
Saketha, 14



What helps me during an emergency is knowing that I'm not going through it alone. It's also knowing that when things get unsteady, I have people who I can turn to!
Angie, 16



3. Be the leader

A loss of structure and routine, such as kura / schools being closed, can be challenging for tamariki. Try and return to normal routines as much as possible. This could be through maintaining regular meal times and continuing family activities. Ensure that children know that any challenges ahead are not their problem to solve, however their views are welcomed.

Discuss your emergency plan with the children in your life and include their suggestions and ideas. Knowing that you have a plan and are prepared gives children a sense of safety. Some children may wish to be involved in creating the plan, preparing supplies, or checking torch batteries for example. Head to civildefence.govt.nz for help to prepare an emergency plan.

4. Prepare your emergency plan

I feel safer if I know what to do in an emergency and finding my family.
Jasper, 11

I feel safer by having a plan. All of us knowing where to go and how to get there.
Oli, 14



I feel safe if we have emergency food rations incase I get hungry!
David-James, 10

Having a plan with my whānau of what to do in the event of an emergency and not panicking helps me feel safe.
Aarthi, 16



Helping during or after an emergency has passed gives children back a sense of control. This could be through clean up tasks or preparing supplies. Children can support those directly affected by making donations of clothes or toys, fundraising, or baking for emergency shelters. These activities also give tamariki much needed connection if they can engage in these activities with their loved ones.

5. Let them help

News coverage may upset and frighten children. Where possible, it is preferable for you to read the news and update children on what they need to know. If children do come across upsetting images or footage, help them put the disaster in context and tailor the conversation for their age. Tell them how you and the community will keep them safe.

6. Limit media exposure

Additional Resources

Download Save the Children's [Safe Place app](#) for children on our [education hub](#).

For support preparing an emergency plan, head to civildefence.govt.nz

Learn more about disasters at getready.govt.nz



Save the Children