

# Supporting infants and children in disasters: A practice guide

**WHO?** This guide is for anyone supporting infants, children, parents and/or families who experience a disaster. This includes individuals and organisations currently engaging in this work and those who may do so in the future.

**WHAT?** A practice guide that covers seven topic areas and includes 17 key resources: 11 practice papers + six mini papers featuring video interviews with practitioners, actor-based practice scenarios, case studies and podcast episodes.

**WHY?** The guide was created to equip practitioners with foundational knowledge and evidence-informed approaches to support and promote the long-term healing and wellbeing of infants, children and their families before, during and after disasters.

[Start with...](#)

[Disaster preparedness](#)

[Psychological first aid](#)

[During disaster](#)

[Worker wellbeing](#)

[After disaster](#)

[Recovery practices](#)

Title	What's covered	Videos	Interviewees
<p><a href="#"><u>Start with...</u></a></p> <p><a href="#"><u>Why we need to support infants and children before, during and after disasters</u></a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How increases in severity and frequency of weather-related disasters in Australia pose greater risks for infants, children and families.</li> <li>• How disasters can impact the short- and long-term mental health and wellbeing of infants and children specifically.</li> <li>• What positive mental health in infants and children looks like and what supports it.</li> <li>• Ways children may respond to disasters and how their ecology, development and functioning may be affected by disaster.</li> <li>• Applying child-centred practice strategies and tailoring interventions to meet infants and children's holistic needs so they can thrive even during adversity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The increasing risk of disaster exposure for Australia's children</li> <li>• What shapes an infant's or child's mental health in a disaster context</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr Andrea Baldwin</li> <li>• Dr Alex De Young</li> <li>• Sarah Eagland</li> <li>• Heather Smith</li> <li>• Bron Sparkes</li> <li>• Dr Briony Towers</li> </ul>

Title	What's covered	Videos	Interviewees
<b>Disaster preparedness</b>			
<p><a href="#"><u>Disaster preparedness with a focus on infants, children and families</u></a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why disaster preparedness is important not only for ensuring safety and protecting lives but also for facilitating the recovery of infants, children and families.</li> <li>• Understanding and identifying the physical and psychosocial risks to infants and children's mental health during a disaster, including traumatic stress responses to potentially traumatic events.</li> <li>• Making the needs of infants, children and families visible during disaster and emergency management planning with services, agencies and organisations to ensure plans are appropriately resourced to inclusively respond to the needs of infants, children and families.</li> <li>• Engaging children and their families safely, sensitively and appropriately in activities that will build their capacity, skills and psychological preparedness for responding to disasters, and support their mental health and wellbeing during and after these events.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why we must focus on infants, children and families in disaster preparedness</li> <li>• Child-centred and family-focused disaster preparedness</li> <li>• Psychological preparedness with children and families</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr Andrea Baldwin</li> <li>• Chris Gostelow</li> <li>• Karleen Gribble</li> <li>• Dr Sharleen Keleher</li> <li>• Michelle Roberts</li> <li>• Heather Smith</li> <li>• Dr Briony Towers</li> </ul>

Title	What's covered	Videos	Interviewees
<p><a href="#"><u>Understanding how disasters influence infants and children</u></a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How disasters can influence the physical and mental health of infants and children.</li> <li>• The 'whole child' and how their ecology, development and functioning may be impacted by disasters.</li> <li>• What shapes how infants and children may respond to disasters.</li> <li>• How to identify the symptoms of a traumatic stress response in infants and children.</li> <li>• How to build infants and children's resilience and the potential for post-traumatic growth.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disasters impacting the child and their ecology</li> <li>• What shapes an infant's or child's mental health in a disaster context</li> <li>• How disasters can influence children's development and functioning</li> <li>• The impact of natural disasters on babies and young children</li> <li>• Stress, trauma and child mental health conditions</li> <li>• What is child mental health? (animated)</li> <li>• How I get through tough times</li> </ul> <p><b>Audio practice scenarios</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Noah's story: Parent-child connection and feeding</li> <li>• Ada's story: Play and emotional regulation</li> <li>• Harry's story: Family dynamics and behaviour</li> <li>• Sophie's story: Threat perception</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ruby Awram</li> <li>• Dr Andrea Baldwin</li> <li>• Dr Alex De Young</li> <li>• Sarah Eagland</li> <li>• Kate Fawcett</li> <li>• Andrea Murray</li> <li>• Michelle Roberts</li> <li>• Heather Smith</li> </ul>

Title	What's covered	Videos	Interviewees
<a href="#"><u>Supporting infants, children and families in an evacuation</u></a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The experiences and needs of infants, children, pregnant people and families during an evacuation and in an evacuation centre, and why it is crucial to respond to their specific needs.</li> <li>The five key elements of providing psychosocial support.</li> <li>Evacuation planning considerations for supporting children and families who have to leave their homes.</li> <li>Considerations for designing a family-focused evacuation centre, including the information, spaces and supplies that support physical security and psychological safety.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Why evacuation is a potentially traumatic experience for infants and children</li> <li>Planning to meet the needs of infants, children and families in an evacuation</li> <li>Child-friendly spaces in evacuation centres</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dr Alex De Young</li> <li>Karleen Gribble</li> <li>Bron Sparkes</li> <li>Dr Briony Towers</li> </ul>

## Psychological first aid (PFA)

<a href="#"><u>How PFA can support infants, children and families who experience a disaster (part one)</u></a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduces PFA as a person-centred, psychosocial approach that focuses on addressing people's fundamental needs, including safety, shelter, food and medical care, while also promoting emotional safety, stability and coping.</li> <li>Introduces the five key elements of providing psychosocial support during and after a disaster.</li> <li>The importance of tailoring PFA to children's age and developmental stages.</li> <li>PFA as it applies to parents.</li> <li>Models and frameworks for providing PFA with children.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Psychological first aid: Stress and survival responses</li> <li>Psychological first aid with infants and children</li> <li>Psychological first aid with parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dr Andrea Baldwin</li> <li>Dr Alex De Young</li> <li>Karleen Gribble</li> <li>Dr Sharleen Keleher</li> <li>Bron Sparkes</li> <li>Ruth Wraith OAM</li> </ul>
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<p><a href="#">PFA with infants and children: Practice guidance (part two)</a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applying the five key elements of providing psychosocial support during and after a disaster.</li> <li>• Preparing and training to provide PFA to infants, children and families within emergency management arrangements and scope of practice.</li> <li>• What is involved in using a collaborative, strengths-based approach to offering PFA to families.</li> <li>• Considerations for offering PFA to infants and children, including age, developmental stages, strengths and vulnerabilities, potential trauma responses, culture and context.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Providing child-centred and family-focused psychosocial support after a disaster</li> <li>• Applying the elements of psychosocial support with infants, children and families after a disaster</li> </ul> <p><b>Video practice scenarios (fictional)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educator</li> <li>• General practitioner</li> <li>• Community mental health worker</li> <li>• Volunteer</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr Andrea Baldwin</li> <li>• Sarah Eagland</li> <li>• Dr Sharleen Keleher</li> </ul>

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<p>During disaster</p>			
<p><a href="#"><u>Supporting infants, children and families during and immediately after disasters</u></a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interventions to mitigate the effects of severe stress or prolonged adverse events on children and prevent their mental health and development being negatively affected in the longer term.</li> <li>• Consideration of existing socioeconomic adversities experienced by some children that can increase the impact of a disaster.</li> <li>• Offering psychosocial and practical support to parents to reduce their stress and increase their capacity to be able to notice and meet their children's needs.</li> <li>• The need for emergency services, volunteer organisations, local government, agencies and service providers to coordinate and integrate a child-centred and family-focused approach into emergency management plans.</li> <li>• Strategies for managing your own wellbeing so you can support others during a disaster.</li> <li>• The five elements of psychosocial intervention/support.</li> <li>• Key practices for ensuring safety, including providing practical support, keeping families connected, protecting and supporting unaccompanied children, providing emotional support, encouraging children's agency, and collaborating and coordinating services.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applying the elements of psychosocial support with infants, children and families after a disaster</li> <li>• Key practices in supporting infants, children and families during and immediately after a disaster</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr Andrea Baldwin</li> <li>• Dr Alex De Young</li> <li>• Sarah Eagland</li> <li>• Kate Fawcett</li> <li>• Chris Gostelow</li> <li>• Karleen Gribble</li> <li>• Heather Smith</li> </ul>

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<b>Worker wellbeing</b>			
<a href="#"><u>Wellbeing for workers supporting children and families after a disaster</u></a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How disasters affect worker wellbeing</li> <li>• How child-centred and family-focused approaches to worker wellbeing allow practitioners to better assist children and families during disasters.</li> <li>• The importance of organisational commitment to promoting worker wellbeing and cultivating a culture of care.</li> <li>• Essential practices for fostering workers' resilience, enhancing their capacity to adaptively cope with work-related stressors, and reducing the adverse impacts of work, including psychoeducation and reducing stigma.</li> <li>• Worker approaches to maintaining wellbeing during disaster, including honest self-reflection, building support networks and caring for family.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Psychosocial impacts of disasters on workers, their children and families</li> <li>• Shared responsibility for worker wellbeing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr Andrea Baldwin</li> <li>• Dr Alex De Young</li> <li>• Sarah Eagland</li> <li>• Chris Gostelow</li> <li>• Michelle Roberts</li> <li>• Paul Scott AM</li> </ul>

Title	What's covered	Videos	Interviewees
<b>After disaster</b>			
<a href="#"><u>Supporting the mental health of infants, children and families after disasters</u></a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why providing responsive, timely psychosocial care tailored to the needs of infants and children is a critical component of disaster recovery.</li> <li>• Some of the ways disasters may impact children of different ages and stages of development and who can best support them.</li> <li>• The role of practical and community support in disaster recovery.</li> <li>• The five elements of psychosocial support.</li> <li>• Responsive child-centred and family-focused approaches for supporting infants, children and families in the aftermath of a disaster.</li> <li>• Preparing and training to offer psychosocial support to infants, children and families within emergency management arrangements and scope of practice.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Why is it important to focus on infants and children in disaster recovery?</li> <li>• Supporting infants and children by providing psychosocial care to parents</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kate Fawcett</li> <li>• Chris Gostelow</li> <li>• Bron Sparkes</li> <li>• Ruth Wraith OAM</li> </ul>
<a href="#"><u>Working with parents to support children after disasters</u></a>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How the parent-child relationship shapes children's recovery from disasters.</li> <li>• Partnering with parents to support children after disasters.</li> <li>• What promotes individual and family resilience.</li> <li>• The five elements of psychosocial support.</li> <li>• Six practice positions and using the PERCS Conversation Guide to engage with parents.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How parents are influential in supporting children after disasters</li> <li>• Parent-child relationship loop</li> <li>• Impact on parenting and the parent-child relationship after a disaster or traumatic event</li> <li>• 'On the up' dads bush playgroup</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr Andrea Baldwin</li> <li>• Sarah Eagland</li> <li>• Heather Smith</li> <li>• Bron Sparkes</li> </ul>



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### Recovery practices

<p><a href="#"><u>Practices for supporting infant and child mental health after disasters</u></a></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental health approaches and models that offer timely and tailored support for infants and children after disasters.</li> <li>• How to support parents and educators to support children after disasters.</li> <li>• Considering the 'whole child' and understanding trauma responses in assessing infants and children's mental health needs.</li> <li>• Shifting perspective to engage children as partners in practice.</li> <li>• The five elements of psychosocial support.</li> <li>• Key practices for supporting the wellbeing and capacity of adults who care for infants and children.</li> <li>• Supporting infants, children and families through loss.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Models of service</li> <li>• Stress, trauma and child mental health conditions</li> <li>• Children at the forefront of climate change (UNICEF)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr Andrea Baldwin</li> <li>• Dr Alex De Young</li> <li>• Sarah Eagland</li> <li>• Michelle Roberts</li> <li>• Heather Smith</li> </ul>
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<p>Strategies for supporting infant and child mental health after disasters</p>	<p>Six mini papers with a series of practice strategies and scenarios that workers and parents can use to support children's resilience during disaster recovery:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <a href="#">Child-adult relationships</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Emotional regulation</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Communication and meaning-making</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Play and creative expression</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Routines and predictability</a></li> <li>• <a href="#">Support networks</a></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Impact on parenting and the parent-child relationship after a disaster or traumatic event</li> <li>• Children's meaning-making in relation to a disaster or traumatic event</li> <li>• The importance of story and play for young children following a disaster</li> <li>• Re-establishing routines and rules following a disaster or traumatic event</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr Andrea Baldwin</li> <li>• Dr Alex De Young</li> <li>• Sarah Eagland</li> <li>• Kate Fawcett</li> <li>• Dr Sharleen Keleher</li> <li>• Michelle Roberts</li> <li>• Ben Rogers</li> <li>• Heather Smith</li> <li>• Bron Sparkes</li> <li>• Dr Briony Towers</li> <li>• Ruth Wraith OAM</li> </ul>