

# Extreme weather and anniversary reactions



Across our beautiful country, communities are impacted each year by extreme weather events, such as flooding, hailstorms and cyclones. While these weather conditions often build quickly, community recovery can take many, many months. Subsequent storm seasons, and the anniversary of extreme weather events, can be key milestones in the emotional journey of affected communities.

## This first-year anniversary offers an important time to:

- Take note of, and respond to, our reactions to seasonal triggers (such as weather warnings, building clouds, high winds and stormy weather)
- Remember losses associated with last year's weather event
- Stop and identify accomplishments
- Recognise those who are supporting the recovery process
- Promote resilience and healing

It can be helpful to know that it is common to have strong reactions at anniversary times. Recovery takes time, and it requires rebuilding on many levels – physically, emotionally, and spiritually. All in all, anniversaries can be a time when we can do with a little more support.



## How might children and young people react to stormy weather or seasonal triggers? Everyone reacts differently and this is OK.

### Responses may vary depending on:

- Personal experiences and losses last year (loved ones, pets property damage, precious items)
- Experiences since the event, including the level of disruption in our daily lives and on those around us
- The quality of the physical and emotional support we have received, and remains available, from family, community, schools and other support networks
- Exposure to disaster-related media from last year

Children and young people can become anxious, upset, withdrawn or angry without realising what the feelings are about. They might also show signs of reluctance to sleep alone, go to school, be apart from parents and worry for the safety of loved ones. Some children and young people may want to participate in public or private memorial or remembrance events (if these are taking place) but others may prefer to avoid thinking and talking about the event altogether. The way we each respond to change and loss, immediately and over the longer term, can differ a great deal.

# Extreme weather and anniversary reactions

## How can we best support children and young people at this time?

- Take time to check-in with yourself
- Be open to age-appropriate communication – be honest about your own reactions and concerns and help children recognise and cope with seasonal / weather-related triggers
- Limit children's exposure to media relating to the anniversary
- Support children to feel safe – discuss and attend to ideas to reduce the impact of upcoming storms at home, remain calm, spend time together
- Seek opportunities for children to make positive differences in their lives and communities
- Prepare them for the anniversary and offer choice – e.g., around whether to participate in any memorial events planned in the community and at school

## Reflect

- Reflect on how things are going for your child – how do they seem to have adapted at home, at school and in the community? Are things progressing in a generally positive direction?
- Seek help if your child's overall reactions and emotions seem to be getting worse rather than better since the event (bearing in mind that anxiety may rise around the anniversary and in response to stormy weather).

## What was the most significant learning for your child as a result of the program?

Developing a "toolkit" for coping and problem solving.

## Here is what children tell us about Stormbirds:

"That it's ok to be worried."  
"That I am not alone."



## For educators:

Schools often play an important role in supporting children in communities affected by extreme weather events. In addition to sometimes providing shelter, schools typically provide timely and appropriate information for students and their families and sometimes offer programmes and interventions aimed at managing post-disaster stress. Such programmes can be very effective in acknowledging the impact of change and loss resulting from weather events and natural disasters, teaching positive coping strategies and building a support network.

One such intervention is the Stormbirds programme, which is offered in many communities.

The aim of the Stormbirds programme is to support children and young people to adapt to experiences of change, loss and grief resulting from natural disasters including extreme weather events.

## Stormbirds participants have the opportunity to:

- Learn about how change, loss and grief are part of life and normal to experience following a natural disaster ([Session 1](#))
- Develop skills to name and attend to their feelings, cope on difficult days, problem solve and make good decisions ([Session 2](#))
- Remember good times and special places ([Session 3](#))
- Identify their support network – people they know, places they go or things they can do when they need some extra help ([Session 4](#))
- Have a say about their experiences in a safe and supportive environment ([all sessions](#))

## Get in touch

Growing Through Grief  
gtgadmin@acw.org.nz  
[www.growingthroughgrief.acw.org.nz](http://www.growingthroughgrief.acw.org.nz)