

Stormbirds

Growing through natural disaster program



Stormbirds is a small group program that is based on the belief that change, loss and grief are a normal and natural part of life. It provides children and young people who have lived through a natural disaster the opportunity to examine the impact of this experience on their lives.

In recent years, natural disasters have become a feature of life in Australia and internationally. A natural disaster is a major catastrophic event caused by the natural processes of the earth or environment. Examples include floods, bushfires, earthquakes, droughts, cyclones, tornadoes, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis and other geologic processes.

What does it do?

Stormbirds supports children and young people in affected communities to adapt to experiences of change, loss and grief resulting from natural disasters. The impacts from these experiences can be felt at the time of the event, and in the weeks, months and even years following as individuals, families and communities make sense of what has happened, adjust to the changes, recover and move forward toward a new future.

Stormbirds is based on the belief that grief is a normal response to the change, loss and uncertainty that often results from natural disasters. As part of the Seasons for Growth suite of programs, Stormbirds provides an opportunity for participants to learn the knowledge, skills and attitudes required to understand and respond well to such experiences.

The program enables participants to realise they are not alone in dealing with the impacts of the natural disaster, and supports them to develop coping, problem solving and decision making skills.

Who is it for?

Stormbirds is suitable for children aged 5-14. It supports participants in understanding and managing the changes they experience as a result of a natural disaster.

The facilitator ("Companion") is supported to determine the most appropriate timing of Stormbirds delivery following a disaster (generally recommended to be 3-12 months after a disaster event).

"How to work out a plan when I feel upset."

- Primary Student

How does it work?

Stormbirds has two levels:

Level 1 5 - 10 years

Level 2 10 - 14 years

The program is delivered to small groups over four (60 minute) sessions. Stormbirds is based on small group like-to-like peer learning processes (4-7 participants with one adult Companion). This creates a safe space for children and young people to practise new ways of thinking and responding to their change and loss. Each participant receives a journal to complete throughout the program.

How are groups facilitated?

Teachers, professionals and volunteers undertake one day training to equip them to facilitate the program. Training is provided in areas of need after natural disasters and enables adults to learn about children's normal and natural reactions to natural disasters. It also prepares adults to facilitate the safe and creative processes used to explore change, feelings and memories, support networks, and looking toward the future with hope. The training also allows adults to process their own experience of the disaster and its impacts on both their students and their community.



MacKillop Family Services acknowledges the Traditional Custodians and their Elders in each of the communities where we work.



MacKillop celebrates and draws strength from diversity and respects the dignity of all people. We value an inclusive culture where lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, gender diverse, intersex and asexual people (LGBTIQ+) have the right to be safe.

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Program sessions

Session 1 - Change, a natural part of life

Children deepen their understanding of change and explore the idea that change is a natural part of life. Natural disasters impact on everyone and cause changes that are unique to each person, family or immediate neighbourhood.

Session 2 - Feelings and responses

Children often have difficulty accurately naming their feelings, so it is important to provide activities that develop the skills of naming and acknowledging feelings. Children need to be affirmed that their feelings in response to a natural disaster are normal, and are shared by others in similar and different ways.

Session 3 - Memories and support

Children are encouraged to find hope through their memories. Sometimes remembering is fun and sometimes it is painful. This session focuses on networks of support and children are encouraged to name people, places and things that help them when they need support.

Children are encouraged to recall the kindness and caring shown by others, any special help they might have received, and signs of life which have become apparent after a natural disaster. Support after the disaster can be linked to the creation of happy memories and can be an important part of the healing process.

Session 4 - Reconnecting

An opportunity to bring closure to the group, to review the learning from the program and to ritualise a sense of hope and life. This session affirms that the building of our communities, our family and our own lives are life-long processes. It also acknowledges the changes the participants have experienced as a result of a natural disaster have become part of the fabric of their lives and the memories of this event have become part of their identity and personal story.

Outcomes

Supports young people in understanding and managing the changes they experience as a result of a natural disaster

Assists young people in understanding that their reactions associated with a natural disaster are normal

Develops skills for coping, problem solving and decision making

Builds a peer support network

Helps restore self-confidence and self-esteem

Evidence and evaluation

Stormbirds is embedded in the foundational principles of the Seasons for Growth evidence-based loss and grief program. Stormbirds has supported positive changes for children and young people in feeling safe, expressing feelings and identifying support networks. The program has proved to be an effective screening process for children and young people who would benefit from referral for additional support.

Stormbirds was revised in 2020 to include the most recent literature and evidence regarding the needs of children and young people following natural disasters.

"Students demonstrated that they are now equipped to manage their feelings, use their personal strengths and seek assistance ... when faced with any future ... traumatic event as the bushfires."

- Companion

Get in touch

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