

Fact Sheet

PROMOTING SELF-CARE FOR Children and Young People in Times of Crisis



During times of crisis, children and young people will normally look to the adults in their life as role models for how to cope and keep themselves safe.



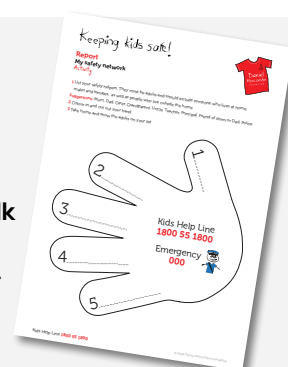
If adults are modeling positive behaviour strategies for dealing with crisis and stress, children are more likely to follow suit.

Practicing positive self-care behaviours is a core part of building resilience for children and young people but they frequently need support along the way. There are several key elements we need to consider when promoting self-care for children and young people that they may need support with, especially during times of crisis.

What You Can Do

- **Model calm**, self care and positivity
- **Talk openly** about stress and prepare positive coping strategies, e.g. breathing exercises, listening to your favourite song
- Develop and maintain a **social network** of positive people
- Provide opportunities for problem solving, **encouraging children to take responsibility**
- Maintain **healthy eating habits**
- Participate in **physical activity**
- Use **creative activities** to alleviate stress
- Ensure **children are aware of who they can talk to** when they feel stressed.

The [My Safety Network Activity](#) is a great start.



Developing and Maintaining a Social Network



A critical part of self-care for any of us is having a good support network that we can connect with in times of need.

Research shows that for young people, social support systems are a critical factor in dealing with stress. As such, it is important for us to encourage and support young people to maintain positive, safe connections with their friends and family wherever they may be in the world. Doing so will help

them to retain a sense of normality and connectedness that helps support healthy brain development.

This is made much easier with the range of social media and communications platforms now available for free – Facebook Messenger, Skype, Whatsapp. Be mindful of removing technology from young people as a behaviour management technique to ensure that they are able to maintain their social support network.

Taking Responsibility

Learning to take responsibility helps young people to take control of their situation.

In times of crisis it is important to promote a solution focused approach and encourage them to participate in positive actions that help their situation. Involving young people in problem solving activities around the home will contribute to the development of valuable skills that support resilience in times of crisis when adults aren't available to help.

An example of this might be to involve the child or young person in helping to make preparations in the home for cyclone season.

Managing Stress



Stress has the potential to be damaging to the long-term health of children and young people.

For this reason, it is important for them to be equipped with strategies for reducing the effects of stress. It is important for parents and carers to engage children and young people in conversations about stress. Such conversations should aim not only to help the young person understand what they are feeling and why, but also assist them in developing positive strategies for coping.

Examples of positive coping strategies include:

- Practicing breathing exercises
- Using a Calm App (if your child is old enough for a phone)
- Meditation
- Blowing bubbles (this helps to regulate breathing)
- Listening to or singing a song that makes them feel good
- Watching funny clips on Youtube.

Healthy Eating

Maintaining healthy eating habits during times of crisis is an important factor in helping children and young people to manage stress.

What we eat can have a profound effect on our emotional outlook and we can sometimes find that in times of crisis we gravitate towards foods that give us an instant burst of 'feel good', such as sweets and chocolate. However, if consumed excessively some of these foods can have a negative impact on a child's emotional and physical well-being.

One way to help young people develop positive eating habits can be to involve them in the preparation of healthy meals and snacks – this can also support the development of useful life skills that contribute to independence later in life and can provide a useful activity to do with children and young people who might be stuck at home during school holidays or during poor weather.

Physical Activity

Encouraging participation in physical activities is also crucial in promoting good emotional health.

Exercise causes a release of hormones called endorphins that make us feel good. Research shows that, for this reason, regular exercise contributes significantly to positive emotional health and a person's ability to cope with stress. Obviously, if children are stuck at home during school holidays or due to isolating circumstances such as a natural disaster this can have its challenges.

But it is possible to promote physical exercise in an indoor or garden setting through fun games and activities. These might include obstacle courses, skipping rope games, dance, musical statues, scavenger hunt.



Creative Activities

Involving children and young people in creative activities such as crafts, art and music can be useful ways of moving them from an emotionally stressful situation into a space where they are able to reset and recharge.

By participating in a creative activity or event, they are able to separate themselves from whatever it might be that is triggering that stress and experience calm.

Reaching Out

Most importantly in times of crisis, children and young people need to feel they can reach out for help when they need it. A vital part of this is knowing who they can talk to whether it be a parent, carer or friend.

A useful tool for guiding and supporting this is the My Safety Network Activity.

Kids Helpline provides a free, 24 hour counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25 on 1800 55 1800.

Where to Get Help

- In an emergency, call the Police or triple zero (000)
- Keeping Kids Safe Resources – The Daniel Morcombe Foundation provides free downloadable activities to engage children and young people in learning about personal safety at <https://danielmorcombefoundation.com.au/keeping-kids-safe-resources/>.
- Parentline - 1800 30 1300 provide free telephone counselling and advice to parents and carers. Resources are available at <https://www.parentline.com.au/> to support parents and carers to understand a wide range of issues related to raising children and young people
- Kids Helpline - 1800 55 1800 provide a free, 24 hour counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25 on 1800 55 1800. Resources and webchat are available at <https://kidshelpline.com.au/>.