Birdies Tree: Engaging Early Childhood Education and Care to support optimal early child development following a natural hazards

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The Queensland Centre for Perinatal and Infant Mental Health (QCPIMH) was established in 2008 as a state-wide hub of expertise in perinatal and infant mental health. QCPIMH has both a state-wide strategy and service development unit and a clinical infant mental health unit which provides specialist infant mental health services in Brisbane.

**Key Directions:**

1. Service development and implementation
2. Workforce development
3. Mental health promotion and prevention
4. Research and evaluation
5. Advocacy
Where did it all begin

2011 Natural Disasters

• 332 major weather events
• 244.7 million people – USD$366.1 billion
• 5 nations most expensive
• 7/10 countries, high – middle income (World Bank)
• Tohoku earthquake and tsunami
  19,850 deaths USD$210 billion
• China, US, Philippines, India and Indonesia
• The 2011 summer
Challenge: Where is the baby?

- Children know more than we think... don't avoid
- ↑ knowledge = ↓ anx
- Scaring doesn't help – what can be done
- Interaction + guidance = problem focused coping
- Evidence that health +ive ↑ video games.
- Play = processing
Recovering together after a natural disaster

Supporting families in pregnancy and early parenthood

Disasters affect people in different ways. Each family member may react differently to the same event. These reactions can be severe, and are usually worst during or straight after the disaster. In most cases, reactions fade over time.

Common reactions to disasters include:
- feeling numb and detached, or overwhelmed
- feeling fearful, sad or guilty
- feeling anxious or irritable
- feeling jumpy, restless and unable to focus
- feeling unable to plan ahead
- changes in sleep or appetite
- troubling memories or bad dreams
- constant questioning and distressed thoughts
- ‘reliving’ the event.

Things you can do to recover:
- have reasonable expectations
- break tasks down into small, manageable steps
- take time to relax by doing something you enjoy
- do something fun with your baby
- try to get enough sleep or rest
- communicate and connect with others
- think about your baby’s needs
- look towards the future
- seek help if necessary.

Looking after yourself helps you look after your baby

Always seek professional help, if you or a family member experiences any of the following:
- the above symptoms continue for longer than one month and affect your day-to-day functioning
- feelings of hopelessness or lack of interest in the future
- avoiding things that bring back memories of what happened
- being fearful, nervous or panic-y (racing heart, startlin’ dizzy, diiznless, shortness of breath)
- lack of energy and ongoing tiredness or sunniness
- lack of enjoyment from things that you usually enjoy
- having trouble relating to and caring for your baby
- feeling guilty
- wanting to harm yourself or your baby, or thinking about ending your life.

Common physical and emotional reactions of babies and young children when distressed include:
- being clingy, whiny, irritable or unsettled – crying more
- seeming fearful, especially when parents are not present
- being more withdrawn, less responsive to parents and/or others
- eating less or more than usual
- having difficulty sleeping
- being hard to settle and soothe.

Young children may also:
- be more easily frustrated and have more tantrums
- be more aggressive
- act out scary events in their play
- have nightmares
- lose previous skills or “go backwards” e.g. toiletting, walking, talking

Things you can do to help your baby or child:
- spend time with them to help them feel safe
- re-establish regular routines as soon as possible
- play with your child – choose activities they enjoy like bubbles, play dough, reading, singing and dancing
- have fun together
- communicate with others who support your child
- help your child feel understood by labelling their feelings
- limit their exposure to TV and radio reporting on the disaster
- look after yourself.
Booklets

Queensland Centre for Perinatal and Infant Mental Health

Recovering together after a natural disaster
Supporting families in pregnancy and early parenthood

Queensland Centre for Perinatal and Infant Mental Health

Recovering together after a natural disaster
Supporting families with babies and young children
Two sided information sheets with activities

Recovering Together after a Natural Disaster – Cyclone
Information and Activity Sheet for Families with Babies and Young Children

When natural disasters happen, nearly everyone has some reaction and emotional response, whatever they are already or have previously experienced. These reactions often involve a range of emotions that can be described as normal reactions to the event that has occurred. Children are equally normal reactions to the event that has occurred.

Children’s Health Queensland Hospital and Health Service
Child and Youth Mental Health Service

Birdie and the Cyclone

One day Birdie saw dark clouds in the sky.

The sky got darker and darker. Then wind blew hard and harder. Even began to fall.

Birdie’s read two men came.

Help was coming.

When the cyclone stopped, there was mud and broken everywhere. Birdie’s read two men showed away. She felt very sad.

All people need help and children are no exception. Birdie felt safe and happy again.

Where to get help

- Your child’s Paediatrician
- Child Health Service
- General Practitioner
- Child Psychologist
- Child and Youth Mental Health Service

To access regular support, a service or organisation, such as a support group, or to access professional help, you can speak to your child’s Paediatrician, Child Psychologist, or Child and Youth Mental Health Service. The information here is not professional advice, protection help is available.

Vulgis a Geesburgh

Children’s Health Queensland Hospital and Health Service
Child and Youth Mental Health Service
Birdie and Mr Frog
Recovering together after a natural disaster

Welcome to Birdie’s Tree! Natural disasters like storms, cyclones, floods or fire can be very frightening and upsetting for babies and young children. Playing a therapeutic game or reading a story with a caring adult can help a young child work through the scary experiences and big feelings.

There’s information for parents and carers too. Come and meet Birdie and Mr Frog!

Early Childhood Education and Care

Theory section
- Factors Affecting Children’s Experience
- signs & symptoms
- Why early intervention?
- Helping Babies and Young Children Cope Using the Program
- Other Beneficial Activities
- Self-care for Educators

Activities
- Educational Programs and Activities - Children 0-24 months
- Educational Programs and Activities - Children 2-4 years.
Research Project Aims

• To develop the capacity of the Early Childhood Education and Care workforce to support young children’s approaches to processing the emotional impacts of natural hazards and disasters.
Intended Outcomes

Increase in educator:

• knowledge about the impacts of experiencing natural hazards and disasters on young children;

• ability to identify and appropriately respond to the needs of children and their families during and post-disaster;

• ability to identify when a child is in need of referral for additional support, and the appropriate referral pathway; and

• self-efficacy to support young children’s social emotional well-being, and how this relates to processing the emotional impact of disasters.
**Research Design**

**Stage 1:** Scoping Exercise + Resource Development (QCPIMH)

**Stage 2:** Professional Learning Program Development (CQUni + QCPIMH)

**Stage 3:** Evaluation (CQUni)
Stage 1: Scoping and Resource Development

- QCPIMH consultation with early childhood learning centres in Toowoomba / Lockyer Valley (post-2011 floods);
- Birdie’s Tree resource development;
- Literature review:
  - Infant mental health,
  - Disaster resilience + current disaster resilience education programs,
  - Early childhood educator professional development and learning;
- Consultation with ECEC sector.
Stage 2: Professional Learning Program Development

- Collaborative approach – CQUui & QCPIMH, in consultation with ECEC sector partner
- Program aligns with the *Recovering Together After A Natural Disaster: A Resource Guide for Early Childhood Education and Care Services*
- Program development informed by Scoping Exercise
  - What do we know about the needs of the ECEC workforce?
  - What are the needs of young children and families pre- and post-disaster?
  - What do we know about disaster resilience and preparedness education?
  - How do we ensure effectiveness and sustainability of the program?
Stage 3: Resource Guide and Program Evaluation
Summary

- QCPIMH resources
  - Available on request and for download
- PhD journey
  - Planned for completion October 2020
  - Updates
- Please make contact for further information
Contact Details

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