

Stormbirds: Delivering tailored support to children affected by bushfires



stormbirds
Growing through natural disaster

In the Stormbirds program I have learned that ...

Memories are important.

Primary School Student

HOW

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.

Stormbirds supports young people in understanding and managing the changes they experience as a result of a natural disaster. The program enables them 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 in an atmosphere of like-to-like peer support.

AIMS

Stormbirds encourages young people to value who they are and the particular story they have. It also helps to modify, where necessary, their thinking attitudes, beliefs and constructs about life, and to “take charge” of their behaviours.

The program emphasises the importance of storytelling as a means of acknowledging loss, of managing the feelings associated with the loss and of moving forward in hope.

PROGRAM

The Stormbirds program has two levels:

Level 1 5 - 10 years

Level 2 11 - 16 years

The program is delivered to small groups over four sessions. Each participant receives a journal to complete throughout the program.



COMPANIONS

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

SESSIONS

Session 1 - Change, a natural part of life

In this first session the children will 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 the children are encouraged to name people, places and things that help them when they need support.

OUTCOMES

Each session explores a theme such as:

- ◆ 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

A trained Companion facilitates the process, providing a safe and creative way to explore feelings, memories, and the loss and grief associated with a natural disaster.

Children are encouraged to recall the kindness and caring shown by others, any special help they might have received, and/or any 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

Session 4 is an opportunity to bring closure to the small group, to review the learning from the Stormbirds program and to ritualise a sense of hope and life.

It affirms that the building of our communities, our family and our own lives are life-long processes.

Session 4 also acknowledges the changes the participants have experienced as a result of a natural disaster have become part of the fabric of the children's lives and the memories of this event have become part of their identity and personal story.

