

Gifted children often make quicker, more sophisticated and complex connections to what they see and hear. Asynchronous development may mean that they read and or/process things far beyond their physical and/or emotional age. In the case of natural disasters, feelings such as helplessness, isolation and fear can escalate along with genuine and deep concern for people, animals and property.

The AAEGT is committed to providing support information to parents and teachers of gifted children who have experienced the trauma, hardship and displacement of natural disasters. As parents and educators, we can be caught unaware of the intensity of children's responses and unsure of the best courses of action to take to relieve their stress.

Media Coverage

Whilst media coverage during times of disaster is important, news stories, social media posts and the like often show the raw devastation experienced by humans and animals and to property. Recounts, particularly those at the scene, are often given when humans are at their most vulnerable. The emotional intensity of these recounts often tears at the heart-strings of most adults. Gifted children can be deeply affected by the ravaging effects of natural disasters on such a large number of people. Adult conversations that are overheard can be processed at levels far beyond the comprehension of their neurotypical peers. Gifted children may become depressed, nervous, anxious, or fearful when hearing disaster news and when viewing images showing the devastation. It is important to be especially aware of what children are accessing and viewing during periods of natural disasters and equally important to be equipped with strategies to enable conversations that calm and reassure.

Responses

Gifted children can experience a multitude of reactions in response to experiencing a natural disaster. It is important that parents and educators do not trivialise these diverse responses, but rather acknowledge and value them, seeking to provide enabling avenues and support platforms. It is the adults' job to recognise deeper cognitive understandings, ease the child's discomfort, and support their desire to learn more, even when a particular area of interest is one that is difficult for people to confront or reconcile. It is a good idea to provide suitable learning opportunities and resources while still acknowledging that some matters or circumstances are not always easily understood.

How Parents and Teachers can help

Parents and teachers who offer a safe and dependable environment, active listening and open communication are on track to support children's emotional well-being. Regardless of a child's age, temperament, ability, exceptionalism or concern, adults should respond to individual development and to intense reactions to natural disasters by working honestly and collaboratively with children to bring some sensibility to situations that may seem volatile or senseless. It is also important to note that natural disasters can be the catalyst in children realising that their parents or teachers cannot keep them safe from all things. This can indirectly affect a child's sense of trust, safety and well-being. Children benefit from connectedness and a strong peer support system.

Engaging and empowering children to participate in solving the resulting problems following such disasters has proven to be effective on many levels. Children are often motivated to learn more about what is troubling them. Engagement in problem-solving processes directs children's energies in positive directions, provides a sense of control and satisfaction, and also helps the victims of the disaster, which is the ultimate goal.

1. Empowering the child

Fundraising

Encourage and support children to get involved in local fundraising efforts. They may like to follow their own initiative/s and make items to sell, put on a concert or complete odd jobs to donate money. Practical involvement enables a child to feel like they are contributing and making a difference.

Resource drives

Get involved in or start a drive to generate donations of clothes or other resources.

Animal welfare

For some children, concern about animals is paramount, so they might support efforts to save and relocate animals and pets displaced by natural disasters. Building nesting boxes or sewing pouches is another practical way to help support wildlife impacted by natural disasters.

Media

Support children to write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper thanking volunteers and firefighters for their efforts.

Research project

Investigate which flora or fauna has been damaged/ impacted. When safe, head out for a walk and look for signs of life - both animal and plant. Identify a plant or animal that children could research to determine how best to rehabilitate or regenerate. This could be done via a range of multi-media platforms and shared with local wildlife authorities.

Interview

Identify an opportunity to interview a volunteer, firefighter, Australian Defence Force member once the crisis has passed. Develop questions beforehand that allow for information gathering, experiences, challenges and successes. The outcome of the interview could be added to a journal or shared.

Journal writing

Capturing what children see, think and feel in a journal is one way to channel the myriad of thoughts that arise during a natural disaster. A journal could include items such as illustrations, annotations, thought bubbles, or gratitude lists. It could include daily critical information such as temperature, air quality, wind direction, the current happenings of the community. This could become an important artefact that documents a moment in time.

Community problem-solving and future problem-solving

Becoming involved in community problem-solving encourages gifted children to tackle a real problem in their community and learn the processes of creative problem solving that can be applied in any issue of concern. future problem-solving encourages them to think about potential problems of the future, learning a creative problem-solving process, the importance of teamwork, and awareness of how things may be different in their future lives. These strategies help students cope with the unknown and bring confidence into their daily lives.

Helpers

Actively identifying the helpers during a natural disaster is a positive way to highlight how people come together in a time of need. This could be done as simply or with as much complexity as the child chooses. From simple observations to documented lists that outline volunteer versus paid, who they volunteer or work for, what their roles are, are they uniformed or plain-clothed, etc.

Mapping

Depending on your geographical location and the availability of resources, follow the news (or alternative outlet) via a topographical map that allows children to identify safe zones, safe pathways, and how future planning might assist towns and farms etc. Actively involving children in developing family fire plans enables them to contribute, develop understanding and can provide confidence.

Baking

If resourcing allows, find simple recipes (such as biscuits) that children can make and distribute free.

2. Seeking Support

Self-expression

Provide opportunities for children to share their voice through self-expression. This may be through writing a poem, short story, letter, keeping a diary or any form of artistic expression.

Counselling

Despite their intelligence, it can sometimes be a struggle for gifted children to put their apprehension into words, to share concerns, to get past a sense of isolation, or to calm a gut feeling that for some reason (perhaps beyond anyone's comprehension) the world seems more troubled now. Children who have experienced or been impacted by natural disaster may need access to professional counselling. Parents can access a suitable professional through their health care provider or through professional associations such as the [Australian Psychological Society](#).

Trauma can affect children many years after the impact has occurred. Children need support, understanding and validation, even if they bring up an event that occurred in the past. Many of these suggestions can be acted upon long after the natural disaster has occurred. Talking to children and making sure that you continue to follow the normal routines and rhythms of your daily home or school life are important ways to help children feel safe and secure.

Links to Australian Mental Health/Trauma support for children.

[Headspace National Youth Mental Health Foundation](#)

[Kids Help Line for Teens](#)

[Teens Mental Health: Service, Resources and Links](#)

[Practitioners Webinar: Supporting Children after natural and human-induced disasters](#)

[The National Child Traumatic Stress Network \(USA\)](#)

[Continuing the Healing Journey: Providing Medium to Long Term Support for Children and Families After Disasters](#)