

GETTING ON AFTER A SERIOUS UPSET

Many people in Christchurch and across New Zealand (and even the world) will experience distress such as acute stress reactions and horror following the fatalities in Christchurch - this is a normal reaction to an abnormal situation.



Most people will manage, and any distress will ease with time

Psychological distress is a normal response to this situation. Distress is not only experienced by people directly impacted, it is also experienced by people witnessing injuries and distress to others.

However, there will be some people that will have more profound reactions, particularly later on some time after the event, and will require assistance.

Sharing video footage or images on social media and irresponsible media reporting can be extremely unhelpful for vulnerable people, not just in New Zealand, but all around the world. It may trigger previous trauma for them, or if they are directly impacted and have had loved ones harmed or killed, may experience a more intense trauma response. Merely viewing this material and discussing it with people who are vulnerable can also be unhelpful.



How are you feeling?

People react in different ways – there is no right or wrong way to feel. You may experience fear, confusion, shock and disbelief, which is a normal reaction to this situation.

Many people in Christchurch and Canterbury may remember previous events such as the Pike River Mine, the Christchurch Earthquakes, and Kaikoura Earthquake and feel overwhelmed.

If you are feeling distressed, stay with people you trust, or if others are distressed make sure they are not left alone and try to keep safe until the reaction passes or until you can find help from a professional.

After a time (days, weeks or even months), some people feel loss or damage and may respond in other ways:



- feelings that are really strong - guilt, crying spells or sadness, not caring, caring too much
- thinking that won't stop – nightmares, poor concentration, thoughts and memories popping up, blaming yourself, confusion, disorientation, indecisiveness, worry, revenge
- physical reactions – difficulty sleeping, upset stomach, exaggerated startle response, 'jumpy', tension, fatigue, aches and pains, nausea, change in appetite, loss of concentration, breathlessness, shakiness, muscle weakness
- reactive to other people – distrust, withdrawing, arguing, fighting, being irritating, on edge, can't be bothered
- anger and blame is common and some may become angry at their god, or others, or at groups of people who are different from themselves
- children may show similar reactions, become more clingy, get angry, or go back to younger behaviour.



KEEP YOURSELF AND YOUNG PEOPLE SAFE

Protect yourself and especially children and young people, as well as our elderly, from being exposed to any shocking images on TV or social media, like any footage from the event or even following the event (e.g. injured people).

Even hearing stories about the event can upset children young people or vulnerable adults. Be careful with discussions that young children can overhear.



If children are already aware of what happened, simple explanations can help them. Reassurance of their safety is also important. Talk about your safety plans for *natural* disasters – when there is a windstorm, a flood or snow, how will you let each other know what to do, where to find each other?

Answer any of their questions as honestly and generally as you can but without any distressing details. Be aware that some young people may have different levels of exposure to media material and talk about the situation.

As caregivers it is important that you are aware of what your child or young person is exposed to best help them through this time. Skylight have very good resources for children's anger, sadness and grief.

Look after yourself when helping

Helping responsibly also means taking care of yourself. Rest when you are tired. Eat when you are hungry. Spend time with your friends and family when they need you.

As a helper, you may be affected by what you experience in a crisis situation, or you or your family may be directly affected by the event. It is important to pay extra attention to your own wellbeing and be sure that you are physically and emotionally able to help others.

Take care of yourself so that you can care for others

If working in a team, be aware of how the others are doing.

Positive ways of coping

Family and friends are precious and important, so spend time with them. Some helpful tips...

- Connect with friends and whanau. Face to face is best, but even picking up the phone or making a video call can help.
- Look after your health and the health of your family. Get sleep when you can. Eat healthy meals. and avoid alcohol or other drugs.
- Encourage kids to talk to you or use drawings to express their feelings.
- Return to your normal daily routines and activities as much as possible, particularly for children.
- Take time out: make time for things that help you let off steam and feel good in every day. Go for a walk. Listen to music. Pray. Talk with friends.



Do stuff you like with people you like

When to ask for help

For a few people, feelings of upset and worry keep going and affect us physically, mentally and socially.

It's important to ask for help if you:

- are not getting enough sleep, or are having difficulty falling or staying asleep
- feel very distressed, irritable, on edge, panicky, experience angry outbursts or are agitated much of the time
- feel hopeless or like crying much of the time, in despair, miserable or that you can't go on
- have trouble concentrating at all, are distracted and cannot do your usual tasks as well as usual
- feel the way your are coping is not so good.

For children, withdrawal, aggressive behaviours, difficulties at school, not wanting to leave parents or to sleep may signal struggles. Ask for help if these continue for more than a couple of weeks.

WHERE TO GET HELP

- **1737** Text or freephone **1737** — New Zealand’s free support service with qualified and confidential counsellors, who are ready to help with what’s going on for you or the person you are concerned about.



New Zealand Government

- **Healthline** 0800 611 116 - General health information from a registered nurse.
- **Lifeline** 0800 543 354 or Text ‘Help’ to 4357 - Counselling advice and support.
- **Kidsline** 0800 54 37 54 (0800 KIDSLINE) - Advice & counselling support up to 14 years; 4pm to 6pm weekdays.
- **Samaritans** 0800 726 666 - Counselling advice and support.
- **Shakti Crisis Line** - 0800 742 584 for migrant women living with family violence
- **Skylight** - 0800 299 100 for support through trauma, loss and grief; 9am-5pm weekdays
- **What’s UP** 0800 942 8787 - Advice & counselling support for 5-18-year old’s; 1pm to 11pm.
- **Youthline** 0800 376 633, free text 234, webchat at www.youthline.co.nz (7pm – 11pm)

What Instep is doing

We are prioritising assistance requests to ensure that the people most in need get help quickly and at the right level.

Onsite assistance is being requested often. If there is a close connection involving loss or harm, we arrange help as soon as practicable. In other cases, we encourage you to give your people time to first find their own response to what has happened. When you know about what’s going on for them, we can provide tailored requesting onsite assistance.

The impacts of upsetting events often appear slowly. In the coming weeks or months, you might notice that you have people in your workforce who do things (or don’t do things) that are reason for concern. This is a time to request onsite assistance.

You know your people and we will work with you to assist those in need

We are grateful for your understanding and compassion when you make assistance requests – it helps if you are willing to wait while others have more urgent needs met.

Response times:

- **Urgent assistance** – we will do our best to get you an appointment within 48 working hours of your contact
- **High needs** – we will do our best to get you someone suitably skilled within 3-5 days
- **Other assistance** – we will arrange assistance as usual, with time varying with helpers’ availability
- **EAP requests** from your people will be met as usual — we are ready to arrange assistance in the ordinary way.



HELPING UPSET KIDS

How children react to big upsets can be different. Sometimes they withdraw. Some are more “babyish” for a while. Others get worried, and don’t want to be left alone, or to go to sleep. Some have nightmares. Others are clingy, and uneasy about doing things they used to enjoy. A few are preoccupied with the event, using what they’ve heard in their play or drawings. Some have physical upsets: stomach aches or headaches.

As with adults, most children will recover fastest with comfort and care from those already with them. Parents or caregivers already know their own kids and will know what works well for them.

You already know to help your kids

Give your children time and attention

- Reassure them that the emergency is over and they are safe
- Encourage them to talk about how they feel about what happened – drawing or building often helps here
- Help them ask questions, and answer these in plain language appropriate to their age – be honest but avoid upsetting details
- Tell them that feeling upset or afraid is normal, that with time they will feel better, and sharing how they are feeling will help
- Be understanding if they have trouble sleeping, throw tantrums or wet the bed — be patient and reassuring, as it will pass
- Remember that children look to their parents to both feel safe and to know how to respond – reassure them, share that you are upset too but that we will all be fine soon
- Try to keep routines going – mealtimes, bedtimes, playtimes and quiet times.

If a child’s distress is so strong that you cannot comfort them, get help

Your GP or your school is a good place to start. Or you can call or text 1737 – free, anytime, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week - to talk it through with a counsellor.

Don’t add to your kid’s troubles

- Don’t talk about the details of a traumatic event repeatedly — this can be harmful, though children may be fascinated/horrified and will talk about what they see or hear
- If your kids fix on something horrible, try to shift them on how they are feeling — *“What happened was awful. It’s normal to feel upset or afraid after that. How are you feeling?”*
- Don’t tell them, *“Don’t worry.”* or *“Don’t be upset”* – better to accept their fear and other feelings and then give them time and attention
- Try not to be over-protective — keep normal routines, to help your kids move on, be distracted by going to the park, playing with friends outdoors and be active and safe in the world again.



Help your kids be kids

For children who have lost someone

Children react to grief in many different ways. Sometimes this is affected by their age. How your family works has a big impact too.

- Pre-school children may see death as temporary – that the person is “asleep” but will wake up.
- Primary school children start to think of it more like adults, but often believe it will not happen to them or anyone they know.
- Children may not have words for how they are feeling, so it shows in what they do – or don’t do, as withdrawing, sulking, being naughty, tantrums, refusing to go to school or to bed. Explain death in plain, honest words they can understand — many kids find “gone to sleep forever”, or “passed on” more confusing than helpful.
- Children often feel things in stages, so may go from being “back to normal” to being distressed, more than once.

Children follow your lead so ask how they are, answer their questions and share some of your hope, to show them that you are all coping together