



Mental Health and Wellbeing – Supporting children during adversity, uncertainty and change

22 March 2018

CHILDREN AND EMOTIONS AND FEELINGS

Distress and worry is an understandable and normal response to learning that you may have loose-fill asbestos in your home or working environment. Children, like adults experience a range of emotions and behaviours and may tune in to parental distress and worry.

Younger children may not have the words to express their feelings. A change in their behaviour may indicate that they are distressed or worried about something, such as their parent's upset and concerns, or something that has happened directly in their own experience, such as a school or friendship problem.

THINGS TO HELP MAINTAIN AND PROMOTE WELLBEING IN CHILDREN

Listen to and comfort children of any age

Avoid assuming a child's behavioural change is to do with being "naughty". It is important to listen to their concerns and worries, to comfort them and to answer questions openly, honestly, simply and to the best of your ability.

Routine

Regular routine of family life is important for children (and adults) especially in times of stress. This includes ongoing contact with people your child knows and trusts and, consistent meal, bed and school times as far as possible.

Media and Conversations

Control or limit your child's exposure to Mr Fluffy or other potentially distressing news stories in the media.

Do not avoid, but try to contain the discussion of Mr Fluffy concerns in front of your children. Keep the channels of communication open for your children and yourself.

Stay active- stay connected

Spend time doing activities that you and your child (ren) enjoy. For example, riding a bike, swimming, walking the dog and playing sport can reduce stress, provide enjoyment and encourage social connectivity.

Issues for families who have had to relocate

Maintain family comfort, affection, connectedness and routine wherever possible to mitigate disruption.

Reiterate it is no one's fault, especially not your child's, that your family has been disrupted and relocated.

SUPPORT

People cope best when they feel supported or know how to access support and information. Support is available from friends and family and a range of health and other professionals.

Recognise your own strengths and those of your family members and draw upon these. Please refer to the help and information section of this fact sheet for more information.

When to ask for help for your child

Persistent changes in your child may indicate the need for an assessment by your GP. Such changes may include:

- Withdrawal from family/friends;
- Regressive behaviours e.g. thumb sucking, bedwetting;
- Aggressive behaviour;
- Behavioural difficulties at school/school refusal;
- Problems separating from parents /caregivers;
- Problems going to sleep/nightmares;
- Preoccupations/worry about the future;
- Complaining of physical symptoms (headache, stomach ache, dizziness) for which no physical cause can be found;
- NB: A previously extroverted and non-compliant child that has become quiet and compliant may also indicate that all is not well.

MANAGING YOUR OWN REACTIONS

A parent or caregiver is the most important resource that children have to help them cope with stress, worry and uncertainty. Therefore be mindful of your own mental health and wellbeing.

Please refer to the Managing Change and Transition InfoSheet for more information - www.asbestostaskforce.act.gov.au/managing-change

WHERE TO GET INFORMATION TO ASSIST YOUR CHILDREN

- Your general practitioner
- Your child's school counsellor
- Parentlink – www.parentlink.act.gov.au
- Child and Family Centres:
 - Belconnen Community Services - www.bcsact.com.au
 - Communities@work – Gungahlin, Tuggeranong, Weston - www.commsatwork.org
 - Community Services #1 - Inner South Canberra - communityservices1.org
 - Northside Community Services - northside.asn.au
 - Woden Community Services - www.wcs.org.au
 - YWCA Lanyon Mura - Tuggeranong - ywca-canberra.org.au/community-services/mura-lanyon-community-centre
- Read the CHAMPS booklet - www.asbestostaskforce.act.gov.au/champs
- Access the BRAVE online self-help program – www.brave4you.psy.uq.edu.au. The program is designed to help young people overcome anxiety and contains resources and information for children, teenagers and their parents.

HOW TO ACCESS HELP

- People who are concerned about their health should seek advice from their general practitioner who can provide an assessment of individual circumstances and asbestos exposure risks.
- General practitioners can complete a mental health treatment plan for anyone experiencing moderate anxiety or depression and provide referrals to other services as necessary.
- The Capital Health Network provides a range of services to members of households affected by loose fill asbestos insulation in the ACT:
 - Clients experiencing mild anxiety or depression can access the Next Step low-intensity service through self-referral, or with client consent, through general practitioners and other health professionals.
 - The Next Step high-intensity services builds off the low-intensity service to provide a higher level of assistance to clients experiencing moderate to severe levels of anxiety or depression. Clients can access the service by visiting their general practitioner to have a mental health plan and referral form completed.
 - For more information on the Next Step service visit www.chnact.org.au/mental-health-programs or phone the Capital Health Network Intake and Referral line on 02 6287 8090.
 - Couples can access priority support from Relationships Australia - www.relationships.org.au - through the Capital Health Network Intake and Referral line on 02 6287 8090.

- Marymead's New Horizons Program is a free confidential mental health early intervention outreach support service for children and young people up to 18 years. For more information visit www.marymead.org.au/services/new-horizons, phone 1800 427 920 or email newhorizons@marymead.org.au.

For any urgent/crisis mental health concerns, particularly in relation to acute stress and/or risks to the immediate safety of individuals contact the Mental Health Triage intake line on 1800 629 354.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- Australia Child and Adolescent Trauma, Loss and Grief Network, ANU earlytraumagrief.anu.edu.au/resource-centre
- Kidsmatter www.kidsmatter.edu.au/families/information-sheets
- Red Cross, *Helping children and young people cope with crisis* www.redcross.org.au/get-help/emergencies/resources-about-disasters
- Wraith, R, (2011) *The Changing Experience of Grief over Time - Children & Adolescents* [www.grief.org.au/ACGB/Publications/Resources Bereaved/Resources for the Bushfire Bereaved/ACGB/ACGB Publications/Resources for the Bereaved/Bushfire Bereaved.aspx](http://www.grief.org.au/ACGB/Publications/Resources%20Bereaved/Resources%20for%20the%20Bushfire%20Bereaved/ACGB/ACGB%20Publications/Resources%20for%20the%20Bereaved/Bushfire%20Bereaved.aspx)

FURTHER INFORMATION

Call Access Canberra on 13 22 81 and ask to speak with the Asbestos Response Taskforce, or email asbestostaskforce@act.gov.au.

ACCESSIBILITY

The ACT Government is committed to making its information, services, events and venues as accessible as possible. If you have difficulty reading a standard printed publication and would like to receive this publication in an alternative format, such as large print, please phone 13 22 81 or email asbestostaskforce@act.gov.au.



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For speak and listen users, please phone 1300 555 727 and ask for 13 22 81. For more information on this service visit www.relayservice.com.au.