

CHAMPS

A change management program for preschool and primary school age children experiencing potentially traumatic changes in their lives due to the 'Mr Fluffy' situation.



This is me!

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Premise

Young children are champs! They have an amazing ability to be resilient and to enjoy life despite difficult circumstances. However, young children's ability to cope can sometimes be overwhelmed by potentially traumatic events in their lives. They tend to 'feel' about things and need help to 'think' about things. As adults, we can help children move fears from the emotional part of their brain to begin to reason what has happened. If events are not unpacked with adult guidance, children may have continued feelings of insecurity and uncertainty. If they unpack what has happened in a cognitive sense they can leave it behind and move on.

This program is designed as an activity-based program to be implemented over a nine-week period after the family has been moved from their 'Mr Fluffy' home. It is designed to be implemented once a week by one of the child's primary caregivers or carers (e.g. parent, grandparent, teacher, friend). It is important that this program be guided by the same adult over the period of its implementation. It is open to the adult's discretion as to whether to revisit portions of the program or skip sections.

About the author

Wendy Hegarty is a wife, mother of two adult children, a daughter, sister and friend. She has been teaching and leading in the field of early childhood education for over 30 years within schools, preschools, childcare centres and tertiary institutions both in Australia and overseas.

On 16 August, 2014, Wendy and her husband received a call to say that their family home was no longer safe to live in due to high levels of asbestos and they were advised not to return or take anything with them. They were moved to emergency accommodation with help from the ACT Asbestos Taskforce. Several days later Wendy's mother-in-law fell ill suddenly and died.



As an adult, these events in themselves are difficult and traumatic. You find yourself confused and in shock. Without the help of a coaching program offered through the Asbestos Taskforce and Capital Health Network I am not sure how I would have come through this situation.

Having a lifetime focus on supporting young children in having the best possible start to life I began to wonder what was available for three- to eight-year-olds affected by the 'Mr Fluffy' crisis. Winston Churchill once said, 'A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty'. I saw the opportunity to give back and I hope this booklet helps families with young children to make sense of what is happening for them, and bring some closure to this season of their lives.

Thanks go to Paul, Ben, Madison, my mum and sister, for all the hugs and love; Cate, who journeyed through this with me, my wonderful friends and colleagues, and Carla, my counsellor who guided me through this terrible series of events.

Handy hint for adults guiding children through this booklet

Important to note: children are much more resilient than we realise and are often really good at integrating events in their lives so that they make sense to them and then they can move forward. This booklet is intended to do this rather than dwell on the situation. Adults bring perceptions and emotions to issues that children may not have, so it is important to keep your own emotions in check. It may be beneficial to engage an adult who is a little removed from the trauma (e.g. a grandparent, friend, teacher) to work through this booklet with the child.

- Always remember that young children are champs. Tell them that they are champs throughout this time with them; end each session with a high five and by telling them they are a champ.
- Find a relaxed and familiar environment for the child and introduce the booklet as their special activity that they get to do with you.
- Use the booklet one-on-one with just the child, not in groups.
- Ensure this time is uninterrupted. Turn off devices, TV, etc. and make sure other family members do not interrupt.
- Be specific and clear with your language—explicitly use the words that describe what is happening such as ‘Mr Fluffy’, ‘asbestos’, etc. and do not use vague terms. (Children will be hearing these terms in the media and in the community so it is best we use the same words to avoid confusion.)
- Talk about actual events that affected them—the more factual you are, the more objective they can be in their thinking.
- Try not to put words into the child’s head. Give them time to think and draw and come back to an activity if it is not working at the time.
- Each week as you move to the next activity, go through from the beginning and revise what you have talked about previously.
- Be aware of how the child is travelling emotionally while they are working through this booklet and be guided by them to take a break when they have had enough.
- When children experience a potentially traumatic event they often have many questions and some of these may be asked several times. Always give children the space to ask any questions that may be on their mind.



Week one

What happened?

This activity enables children to express their perception of what happened. It gives you, the adult, the opportunity to understand their thinking and see what is important to them. It is important to avoid emotive, negative language like 'losing your home'; rather, use words like 'moving to a new home'.

If the child is too young to write their answers in, write them down for them as they tell you. Encourage children to end the activity by drawing a picture (this will tell you where their focus is around this issue).

Tell me what happened to your home?

(This question helps children move it from a 'feeling' to a 'thought'.)

What were you thinking at the time?

(This helps children to recall what they thought at the time, which will help you understand their main perceptions.)

What do you think about it now?

(This will help you understand what their main worry is now.)

What could make it better for you?

(This helps identify what they really want and not our perception of what they need.)

What could you do to help?

(This empowers children to feel they can make a difference.)



Week two

How is this affecting you now?

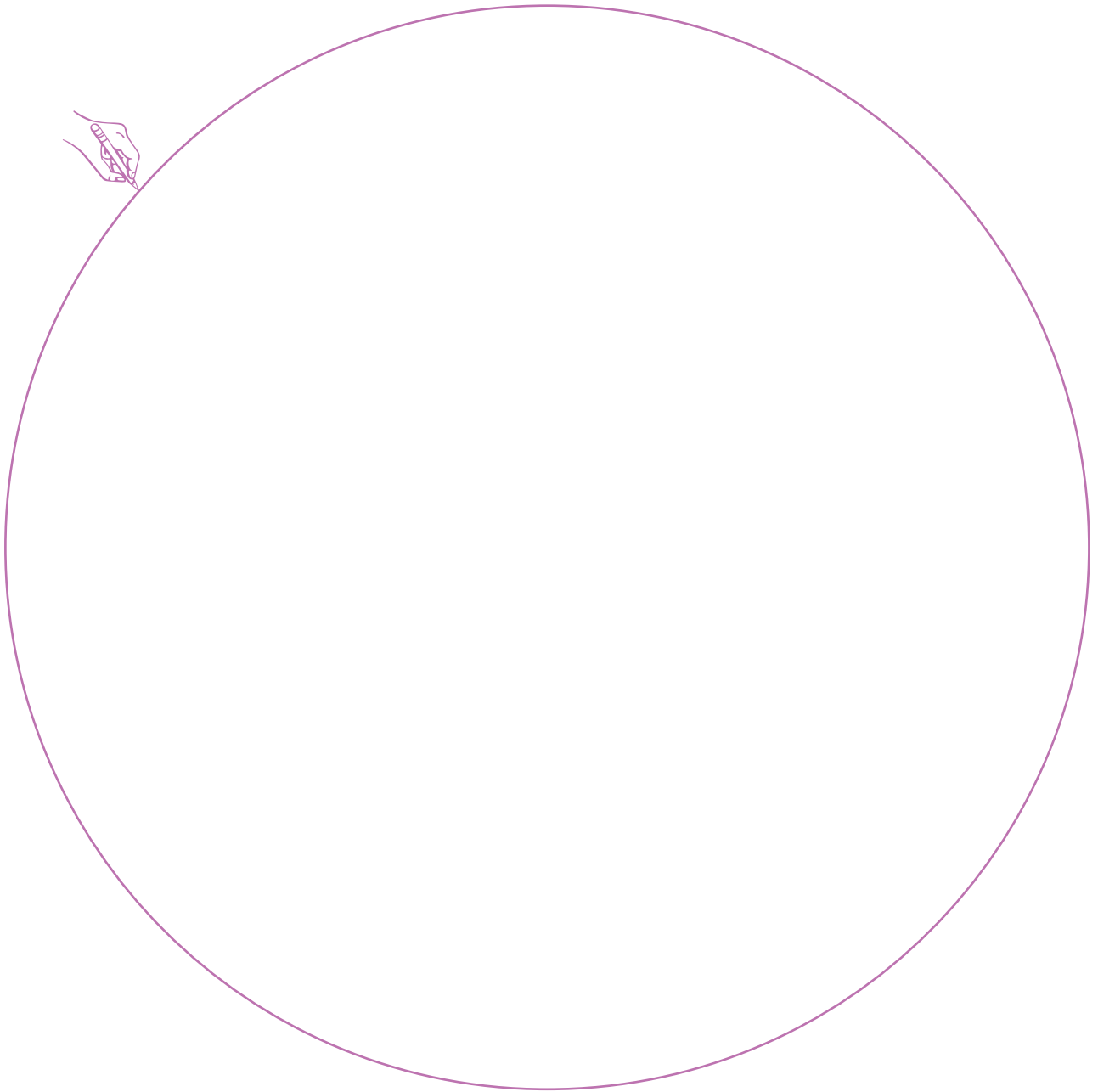
This activity enables children to express their perception of how this situation is affecting their lives now. It helps them to identify all the good things in their life and how little of it is affected by this crisis. It gives you, the adult, the opportunity to break down the issue and compartmentalise the impact of losing their home.

Ask, 'What are the things you do in your life?' List below:

A circle can be broken up into a pie chart to show us what we have in our lives. On the opposite page ask the child to help you fill in the pie graph to represent all of the activities they list in their lives and the time they spend on each. E.g. home, swimming, cousins, school etc.



My Life



Ask the child, 'How does the "Mr Fluffy" situation (moving into a new home) affect these areas of your life?' Ask them to colour in the areas of the pie graph that are affected by moving homes.

Talk to the child about how many great things there are in their lives that are not affected by this situation.




Finish with time for them to colour in, or draw pictures, in the sections of their pie chart.

Week three

Are you worried about anything now?

This activity enables children to focus on an area of concern and express it. If they say they are not worried about anything, move to the next activity and revisit at another time.

Ask the child what they are worried about and grade it according to the sad faces (from 1–3) as to how important it is to them.

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Discuss the worries that the child has listed so you clearly understand what they are referring to.

Explain to the child that there are two types of worries we can have—‘imagined’ worries about some things that may not even happen and where there is little we can do; and ‘real’ worries about things where we can make a difference.

Separate their list into ‘imagined’ and ‘real’ worries.

Imagined worries

Real worries

Talk to the child about what you can do about the 'real' worries. Together, figure out if the child can create change themselves, or if they require an adult to help. Note down a reasonable timeframe for change.

Make a plan and record it in the space below.

Real worries

My action plan



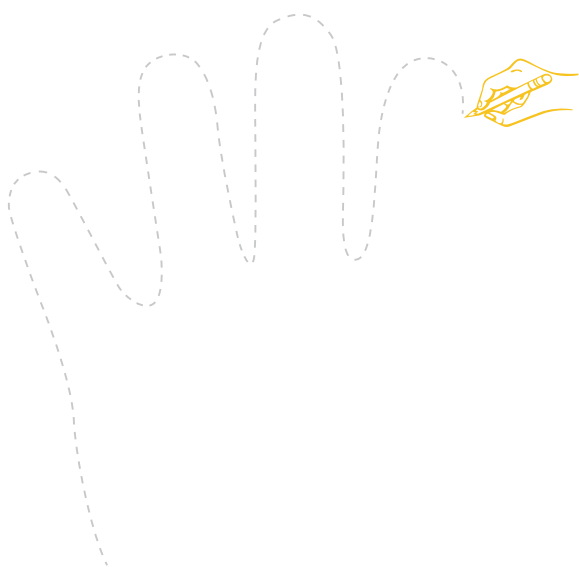
Week four

Who's on your CHAMPS team?

This activity enables children to focus on the people in their lives that they feel loved and supported by. It gives you the opportunity to express that you are doing this booklet with them because you are here as their support.

Trace the child's hand/s on the page. For each finger, ask them to name someone who they could go to for support and what type of support it may be. As you have recalled the past three sessions, relate this to any worries they may still be having and identify where they could seek support.

My CHAMPS team



Ask the child to talk to two people they have listed and tell them they are on their CHAMPS team.

Week five

What's fun?

This activity enables children to focus on the positive things in their lives and to express joy. It is important in this session that you help them to reframe their thinking into positives. If they cannot list too many things, ask them to suggest what they would like to happen, or plan to do something special with them that they can look forward to (e.g. a trip to the park, visiting Questacon, playing a game, etc.).

Create a list of what the child thinks is fun in their lives.

Rate the list with the smiley faces (from 1–3). Ask the child to note how many times a week they get to do these things. Make a plan of how often they can repeat these experiences. Encourage the child to draw a picture too, on the next page.

Fun activity



My action plan

My fun activity



Week six

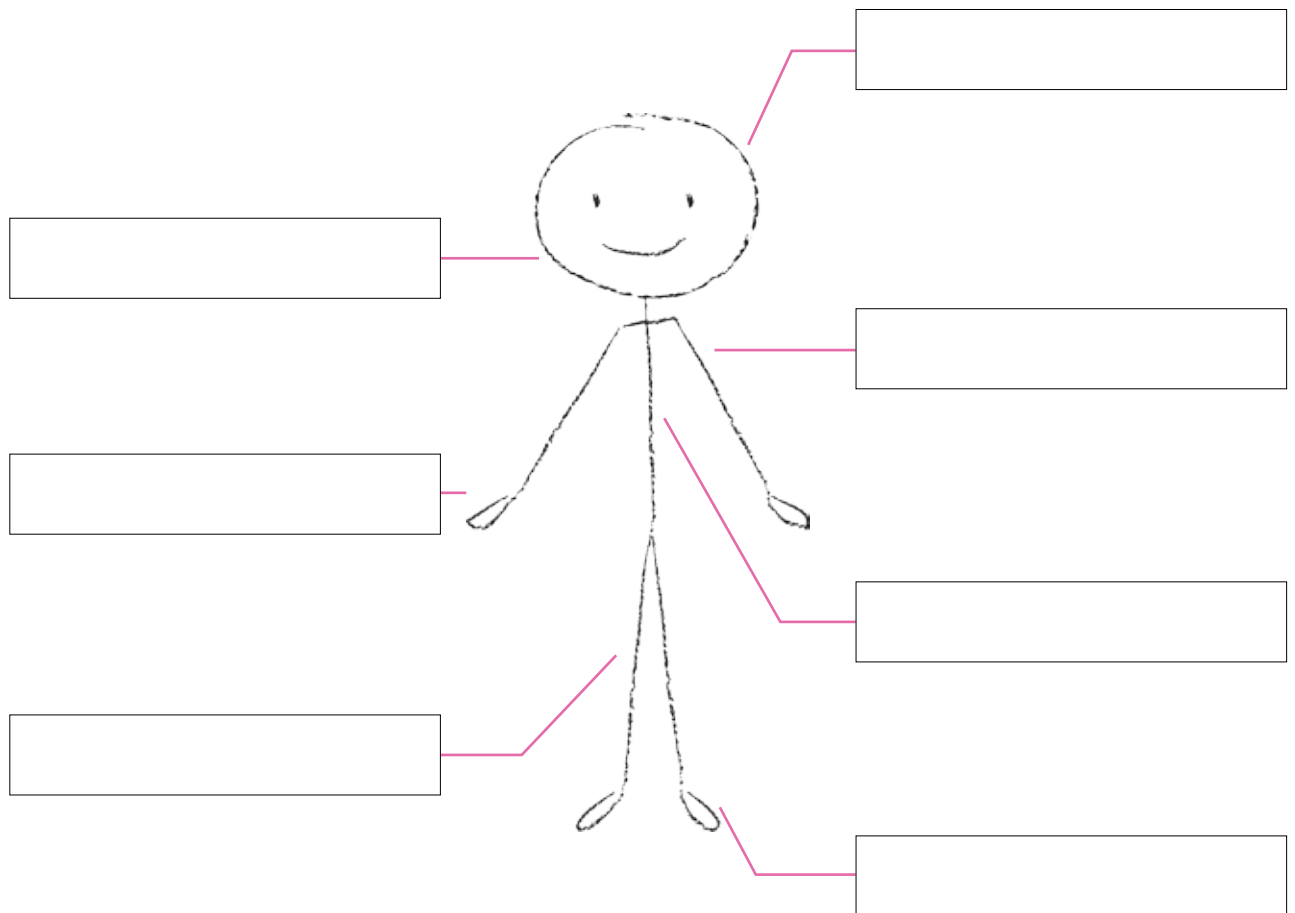
I am a CHAMP!

This activity enables children to focus on their strengths; to realise what they are good at and how they can help themselves and others. Although we do not want children to feel responsible for looking after the adults in this situation, it will help them feel happy if they can make a difference.

Ask the child to think about what they are like. What is nice about them, what are they good at, what can they do? Be ready with suggestions. It is important that you do not compare them with anyone else and you encourage them to accept their individuality.

'We may not have it all together, but together we have it all.'

My strengths



Week seven

Pass it on.

This activity enables children to think about how they can help others. Positive psychology tells us that helping others is healing and helpful with feelings of wellbeing. This is a useful practice for children to engage in.

Review the strengths that the child listed in the previous week. Talk to the child about how they can use those strengths to help others. Ask them to suggest whom they could help and how. If they cannot think of anything, discuss some charities that may need help (e.g. RSPCA, school vegie garden). Ask the child to plan to do at least one thing before you meet next week.

My strengths

My plan for helping others



Week eight

Moving on.

This activity enables children to think about how they were feeling and what they were thinking about when this program started. It helps them to see that worries don't last and can change and they are resilient enough to cope with things as they change.

'One thing that is certain in life, is uncertainty.'

Revisit week three and week five. Look at the things the child was worried about and ask the child to rate them now using their smiley faces. Talk to them about why their worries might have changed and what helped. Ask the child if they have any new worries and list them below, breaking them into 'imagined' and 'real' worries. Note down an action plan for the 'real' worries.

Real worries

Imagined worries

My action plan

Revisit the child's list of fun activities from week five. Ask the child if they have been doing them. Ask what they would still like to do and if there are any new activities they have thought of. Create a list below.

Fun activity	My action plan



Week nine

You are a CHAMP!

This activity enables children to review this event in their lives. By now, they may be able to look at this situation cognitively rather than emotionally and can be ready to put it behind them.

Review the questions from week one and ask the questions again, noting the differences in the child's answers. Finish with time for the child to draw a picture of themselves as a CHAMP.

Tell me what happened to your home?

(This question helps children move it from a 'feeling' to a 'thought'.)

What were you thinking at the time?

(This helps children to recall what they thought at the time, which will help you understand their main perceptions.)

What do you think about it now?

(This will help you understand what their main worry is now.)

I am a CHAMP!



Author's note

I hope this booklet has helped you to identify your young child's ability for resilience. I hope that by compartmentalising this event through their lives with them, it has helped you to move forward in this journey and focus on the opportunities that may come out of this challenge. Mostly, I hope you enjoyed this uninterrupted time with this special child.

Wendy Hegarty

