

Providing support following traumatic experiences

A suggestion for implementing the strategy 'Support emotional wellbeing and positive mental health' from the Guide: [Behaviour and learning](#)

Includes:

- Understanding trauma
- How to explain the stress response to children
- Recognise responses to trauma
- Select effective approaches
- Knowing when to contact whānau
- Useful resources

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From

Guide: [Behaviour and learning](#)

Strategy: [Support emotional wellbeing and positive mental health](#)

Suggestion: [Providing support following traumatic experiences](#)

Date

26 April 2024

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inclusive.tki.org.nz/guides/behaviour-and-learning/providing-support-following-traumatic-experiences

Understanding trauma

Children are faced with many adverse events during childhood.

Build your understanding of why some events result in trauma.

Trauma results from an event, series of events, or set of circumstances that is experienced by an individual as harmful or threatening and has lasting adverse effects on the individual's physical, social, emotional, or spiritual wellbeing (Liberty, 2017).

It is important to recognise that most children recover well from traumatic experiences if they have access to:

- safe, inclusive environments
- responsive relationships that support understanding and problem solving around difficult times.

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How to explain the stress response to children

Nigel Latta explains how to support children to understand the impact of traumatic stress on their own brains.



Video hosted on Youtube <http://youtu.be/WHaottpUIYU>

No captions or transcript

Source:

[Sovereign NZ](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WHaottpUIYU&feature=youtu.be>

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Recognise responses to trauma

Children react to traumatic experiences differently to adults.

Children and young people may:

- withdraw
- become upset
- seem anxious
- be preoccupied with the event in their play or drawing
- have problems sleeping
- have stomach aches or headaches.

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Select effective approaches

Learn how to help students recover from a traumatic experience.

Approaches that can help:

- **Reassure students** that the event is over and they are safe.
- **Emphasise that feeling upset or afraid is normal**, and that asking questions and telling you how they are feeling will help, that with time they will feel better.
- **Be understanding** – students will present a range of emotions and behaviours that will pass over the coming weeks.
- **Give extra attention.**
- **Remember you are a role model.** Students will look to their parents and teachers to both feel safe and to know how to respond and take care of themselves and others.
- **Keep routines** – maintain a predictable classroom routine as this will reinforce feelings of safety.

Approaches to avoid:

- Repeatedly talking about the details of a traumatic event.
- Saying “don’t worry” or “don’t be upset”.
- Being over-protective.

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Knowing when to contact whānau

There may be times when you will need to connect with a child's whānau.

Contact the child's whānau when you notice the following:

- a child's distress is consistently escalating
- the child is displaying worrying behaviours such as extreme withdrawal, or a terror that you cannot comfort them from
- the effects are continuing to have an impact on the child and you feel that things are not improving, or not improving fast enough.

If whānau ask you for advice, recommend the following:

- contact a local GP
- call or text 1737 (free, anytime, 24/7) – to talk with a trained counsellor.

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Useful resources



Trauma-informed education part 1: The impact of trauma on learners

Slide deck presentation from Dr. Chris Bowden, Victoria University Wellington.

Publisher: Victoria University of Wellington

[Visit website](#)



Mental health advice for coping after a traumatic event

Multilingual resources developed to aid coping after a distressing event.

Publisher: Ministry of Health | Manatū Hauora

[Visit website](#)

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