

## Kids in rural and remote areas: Coping with tough times



Children and young people face many different potentially traumatic, adverse and stressful experiences while they are growing up. But for kids growing up in rural and remote areas, the chance that a child will be confronted with trauma or adversity is even greater. It is important to recognize these potential difficulties, how they can impact on children and young people and what can be done to help kids facing tough times in rural and remote areas.

- » Serious illness or death of a family member or friend
- » The ongoing stress and anxiety caused by the uncertainty and possibility of further adversities that are specific to rural and remote areas such as the impact of crop failures; climatic change; and the economic impact of business failures in these areas.

### What is trauma and adversity?

People are familiar with the potential trauma that is caused by child abuse and neglect and other forms of child maltreatment. These types of trauma can have the most serious consequences for children and young people.

However, there are also a number of other adversities and stressful life experiences that face young people in rural and remote areas. These include:

- » Natural disasters; such as drought, floods and bushfires
- » Financial hardship
- » Isolation from peers and other supports
- » Bullying and difficulties in avoiding bullying behaviours of others due to limited options in schooling and social groups
- » Family difficulties such as domestic violence, family separation and divorce
- » Separation from family if attending boarding school

### How are these experiences unique when they happen to children in rural and remote areas?

Children and young people facing trauma and adversity in rural and remote areas have unique difficulties in dealing with these experiences. These include:

- » Limited options in and high demand for services that can assist children and young people.
- » Difficulties associated with smaller population areas, including lack of privacy in seeking help and peer groups being similar across school, sporting and social settings. For example, it may be difficult to escape other kids who are bullying, or there may be difficulties in seeking help due to fear of this becoming known to others.
- » Presence of multiple adversities such as financial hardship or natural disasters placing ongoing stress on the young person and their family.

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### How does trauma and adversity impact on children and young people?

Many children and young people will be resilient in the face of adversity. However, some children will experience ongoing difficulties in coping with trauma and adversity. There has now been lots of research telling us that trauma and adversity are linked with poor mental health in childhood and adolescence and is associated with suicide and substance abuse.

Some of the things to look out for that might show you that your child is having difficulties coping include:

- » Withdrawing from friends and family and losing interest in activities that they previously enjoyed.
- » A change in mood, for example becoming more irritable or showing signs of sadness.
- » Your child might start worrying about issues that they did not worry about previously.
- » Your child may have difficulties sleeping or may be having nightmares.
- » Difficulties with schoolwork and difficulties concentrating.

### What to do if you are worried about the impact of trauma and adversity on your child

The first step in helping your child to deal with traumatic or adverse events is to recognize that the stressful life events that are happening to you and your family may be having an impact on your child. Many people think that when families experience stressful events it does not affect the child, however, we know that this is just not the case. Children are very sensitive to stressful events that are taking place in the family and this can be especially the case when parents are not coping well with the

event as well.

A few tips for helping your children cope with trauma and adversity:

- » Look after yourself. Finding healthy ways to deal with your stress will help your child to feel more settled and secure and will also model positive coping strategies to your child.
- » Recognise that your child may be experiencing difficulties relating to an adverse or stressful life event.
- » Increase your understanding and knowledge about what adversities are and how they can affect your child.
- » Talk to your children and ask them how they are going. Let them know that you are there for them and that you know that they are under stress.
- » Look for creative ways to help support your child if there are limited options in your community. There are a number of great online programs now that provide support and help to young people and their families. Some of these are listed below.
- » Seek help from your GP if you feel that you can't help your child or if you feel like things are getting worse for your child. Remember that seeking help early can help stop more serious difficulties from developing later on.

Most importantly, remember that you know your child better than anyone else and are most likely to recognize early on that they are having difficulties. With the right help and support, children who are not coping with the impact of trauma and adversity in their lives will recover.

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