

Outside of their own homes, schools are the place where students spend the largest portion of their day. Their classroom teachers and other school personnel are seen as trusted adults in their lives. This allows schools to be an important source of support and recovery for students who have experienced a natural disaster. This document outlines some strategies that schools can use and identifies the skills taught in Second Step that are particularly important.

Second Step Skills

Second Step, as a Social Emotional Learning program, is designed to provide students with the skills they need to manage their social and emotional lives. The following skills taught in Second Step will help students after they have experienced a natural disaster:

Identifying and Talking About Their Emotions

Both the Empathy and Emotion Management units have lessons about identifying one's own emotions. Students may have a hard time identifying the exact emotion they are feeling. This is normal and having an exact name for the emotion is not critical. However, being able to describe the physical sensations is helpful. Lessons in the Emotion Management unit can help them do this. In addition, reassuring students that the range of emotions they are experiencing – worry, anxiety, anger, fear – are to be expected following a disaster. Provide age-appropriate information about stress responses to normalise the physical sensations they are experiencing.

Using Emotion Management Strategies

Lessons in the Emotion Management unit teach a variety of calming down strategies. In particular, the following are very helpful:

- Belly breathing;
 - Remind students to breathe in slowly through the nose and out through the mouth. A slow exhale stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system. A variation of belly breathing is to breathe in memories of feeling safe and happy and breathe out the uncomfortable, disaster-related feelings.
- Slow counting
- Positive self-talk;
 - Help students identify negative self-talk related to the disaster.
 - Clarify any misunderstandings they might have about what happened or their part in what happened.
 - Discuss helpful or positive self-talk that they could use instead.
- Relaxation;
 - The Noodle Game taught in the Kindergarten Emotion Management unit is a fun and effective way to have students experience feelings of relaxation.

SIGNS OF DISASTER-RELATED STRESS

- Physical or psychological distress, such as headaches, stomach aches, poor concentration, intrusive thoughts or difficulty sleeping.
- Avoidance reactions such as withdrawing, shutting down, or avoiding talking about what happened.
- Increased arousal such as anxiety, irritability, anger, or fear.
- Change in behaviour, such as self-destructive or risk-taking behaviours, or a drop in school engagement and achievement.
- Depressed mood or negative beliefs.

Asking for Help and Getting Support

There is at least one lesson at every year-level that focuses on getting help or support from an adult when experiencing strong emotions. It's very important that students know that they do not have to cope with the strong emotions on their own.

Showing Empathy and Kindness

Lessons in the Empathy unit at all year-levels teach students to identify how others are feeling, and to show their care and concern with acts of kindness.

- Remind students that others can have the same or different feelings in response to the disaster (perspective-taking).
- Have students reflect on how it feels when someone else has empathy for them - that is when another person feels and understands how they feel.
- Have students identify acts of kindness or support that would feel helpful to them as individuals.
- Have students identify acts of kindness or support they can offer each other in the classroom and around the school.

Other Strategies to Support Students

Create Safety and Support Schoolwide

A foundation for children who have lived through an intense natural disaster is for school to feel like a sanctuary. To create a feeling of sanctuary staff can do the following:

- Provide a warm welcome for all students.
- Recognise signs of stress.
- Respond to problematic behaviours from a trauma-sensitive viewpoint
 - Ask "What has happened to this child that may have triggered these behaviours?"
 - Provide support for the child and help with managing their emotional reactions to the disaster, rather than punishing the behaviours.
- Create spaces for calming down and relaxation. This can be a room in the school or a corner of a classroom.
- Allow children who are struggling with their emotions to request a calm-down break.
- Reinforce Second Step skills.

Provide Opportunities to Process Experiences Related to the Disaster

- Invite students to write or draw about their experience if they wish to, so that they know it is not a taboo topic.
- Facilitate class meetings on their experiences, having first created a sense of safety during these meetings. If you notice a student being triggered by these conversations make sure to check-in with them after the meeting. It may be a student who needs individual support.
- Use puppets from Second Step to initiate conversations with younger children.

Check-in on Each Student Individually

- Make time to have brief one-on-one conversations with each student.
- Let students know they can always talk to a trusted adult if needed.
- Provide small group or individual SEL or counselling sessions as needed.

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