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National
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Centre for Child
Mental Health

Journalists and media staff as parents and carers

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This fact sheet recognises the role journalists and media staff have as parents and carers. The content is taken from [Keeping children and families in mind: Guidelines for media professionals reporting on disaster or community trauma events](#) and is designed to sit alongside the existing Australian media ethics guidelines ([Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance \(MEAA\) Code of Ethics](#) and the [DART Center for Journalism and Trauma](#)).

How can my job affect me and my family?

Media staff regularly experience potentially traumatic events, either directly as a witness or by proxy through the media process (e.g. reading about, discussing, watching or editing footage of the event, etc.). It can be very challenging to bear witness to these events and can leave you emotionally and physically 'worn out', which is known as 'compassion fatigue'. Over time, compassion fatigue may combine with other traumatic symptoms to create 'secondary traumatic stress', which can lead to negative outcomes not only for you, but for your family and loved ones.

Why is self-care important for journalists?

Evidence shows that workers who look after themselves and manage their stress levels are not only better equipped to do their job, but are more effective in the work they do. Looking after yourself (self-care) and managing stress levels will also leave you better equipped to look after the needs of your children and family.

Self-care includes:

- Monitoring your own reactions, emotions and needs.
- Avoiding over-identifying with the people who you are interviewing, or those who have experienced disaster or trauma.
- Identifying and engaging with your emotional support system.
- Seeking help for any trauma-related distress.
- Maintaining a healthy lifestyle and using positive coping strategies to manage stress.
- Maintaining a work/life balance with a focus on self-care for you and your family.



Supporting my family during and after a disaster or community trauma event

While children are often full of pride for the role their parents or family members play in reporting on a disaster or community trauma event, they are usually also very aware of the dangers involved. It is important to provide children with information and support so that they don't have to deal with their feelings about these events on their own.

Delivery partners:



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Tips for talking with your children about your work and what they can expect

On departure

When you are called upon to report a disaster or community trauma event, give your children age-appropriate information about:

- care arrangements (who will be caring for them, where that will be, and when you expect to return)
- your role – answer any questions they have and reassure them that the adults involved (including yourself and other media staff) are trained to respond to these situations
- ways of coping with anxiety and worries during your absence. This may include reminding children of things they like to do when they are feeling worried or overwhelmed (e.g. calming activities such as deep breathing, listening to music, colouring in, etc.).

On return

When you return from covering a disaster or community trauma event:

- check in with your children and try to take some time to answer any questions they have
- help them if they are feeling worried or overwhelmed, using age-appropriate 'calming' activities (e.g. deep breathing, listening to music, reading a story together, colouring in, playing with blocks)
- be aware of your own emotional state and how it might affect your children. You don't have to pretend everything is fine; just be mindful that children can often pick up on underlying tension and may need extra reassurance.



REMEMBER: *It is very important for journalists and media staff who are parents to be aware of their children when discussing the disaster with their partner or other adults.*

Children can be traumatised by an event even if they have not witnessed it. Avoid discussing incidents of death, destruction or loss within their hearing.

If children do hear or see any information that may be distressing, take time to check in with them, clarify the context, and reassure them they are safe.

Ongoing reporting

As the stages of covering a disaster or community trauma event tend to require ongoing work, you may need to repeat these steps with your children every time you depart and return, and regularly check in with them during longer periods at home together.



This fact sheet is part of a suite of guidelines for journalists and media professionals. Find more resources in the [Emerging Minds Community Trauma Toolkit](#).

Additional resources available on the Emerging Minds web hub include:

- [Self-care plan](#)
- [How to talk to children about trauma and disasters](#)

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