

Big Situations – Stories for Reflection

Natural Disasters - Flood



This story refers to a flood and may raise big feelings. Before you read this, make sure this is the right time for you, and that you can access support if you need it. Should any of the information in this document cause distress for you, it may be helpful to contact Lifeline on 13 11 14, Beyond Blue on 1300 224 636 or the Kids Helpline on 1800 551 800.

Read this story to help you be better prepared to respond to flooding in your community, or if you have already encountered a situation like this and you want to hear about other educators' experiences. This is a fictional story informed by real experiences. If you are facing a situation like this now, you can find [Tips for responding now](#) and resources to support children, parents and educators in the [Big Situations](#) section of the NSW/ACT Inclusion Agency website.

The water's rising

We knew that wet weather was coming, but it doesn't usually flood badly around our service, so we weren't prepared for how bad things would be. The day started normally, but the rain was so heavy, all the creeks around us started to overflow. The police came and told us that we needed to get everyone out, because the water was rising fast, and the roads and bridges around us would be closed. We were able to contact most of the families who lived or worked close by, and they came to get their children, but we couldn't reach them all. We evacuated the remaining children in our cars on advice from the police. They escorted us out to higher ground, and we were able to text the other parents.

By the time we left, the play area was starting to flood, so we didn't know whether the water would get inside the building. We had an incident plan, and we have practiced evacuations, but it wasn't like we'd imagined it. It was much messier contacting parents and working out how to get children collected. We have a child who is non-verbal, and his parents couldn't pick him up. It was very stressful for him when we had to leave the centre. We tried to be reassuring and calm, but it was hard for him and hard for us. It's made us think about having a social story we can use in the future if we need to.

We did well to keep things calm. It helped that we kept going with our usual routines, even as the children were being collected. We have also talked with the children about people who help us, and we kept talking about how the police were here to help us because of the heavy rain.

We sent out an email thanking all the parents for their help, and we included a tip sheet about supporting children in a disaster. It was a couple of days before we could get back to the service, so we had to inform the authorities that we were closed for that time. When the children came back, they were pretty unsettled. Some families and team members had substantial flood damage and had to move out of their homes. It's really hard when people have to throw out their belongings and start again. It was hard to know what help was available, especially without access to internet. We were short-staffed, so we wanted our colleagues back as soon as possible, but also understood they needed time.

We had a couple of children who would get distressed when it started to rain, and some of the parents told us their children wouldn't sleep on their own. It was helpful that we had done some training with Be You on grief, trauma and disasters, so we could reassure parents that this was to be expected, and we helped them work out how to support their children. Overtime, as everyone got back in routine, things got better for most families, and we supported a couple of families to access professional support. It was especially hard for people whose homes were damaged, but somehow people managed to keep going, when they had support around them.

Things to think about:

- ▶ Considering the diverse needs and ages of all children at your service...
 - what would educators need to do to be prepared for a critical incident like this?
 - what preparations or planning might educators need to put in place to help children cope with a critical incident like this?
- ▶ This story is about a flood, but communities also face emergencies like cyclones, storms, bushfires and droughts. What emergencies do you need to prepare for in your role as an educator?
- ▶ Think about your service's location. How might your experiences be similar or different to those in the story if you experienced an emergency?
- ▶ What could you do to prepare your team to implement your emergency procedures with limited warning?
- ▶ What do you think parents would need to know in an incident like this? What would children need to know?
- ▶ How can your service and team support colleagues who are personally affected by a big situation?
- ▶ How can policies and procedures support your responses and planning? Do you need to develop or review any policies or procedures?
- ▶ Who would you need to notify if a situation like this happened at your service?

The following resources can help you be better prepared for critical incidents:

- ▶ [National Mental Health Education Initiative](#) (Be You)

Access professional learning modules for educators or to get the most benefit from Be You, sign up your service to create a learning community and access a Be You consultant from Early Childhood Australia.

- ▶ [Community Trauma Toolkit for Educators](#) (Emerging Minds)

Access short courses and resources to help educators support children following a disaster or community trauma.

Note: See additional resources on the [Natural Disasters](#) and [Critical Incidents](#) pages of the Big Situations online resource.

Please remember:

An Inclusion Professional can support educators to proactively prepare to have the skills and confidence to respond to big situations that may occur. This preparation could include support to use the [Big Situations](#) resource and may involve strategic inclusion planning. It should be noted that big situations often require support from experts that sit outside the role and expertise of the Inclusion Professional. Inclusion Professionals can help you connect with external professionals or agencies as needed.

Disclaimer:

This is a fictional story informed by real experiences to support you to reflect and plan for the future. If you would like support or have any feedback on this resource please [contact us](#).