

## ■ Advice for principals and teachers 4: Longer term

- Children look to trusted adults to know how to respond and how to construct their personal narrative of events. Acting in a calm but empathetic manner models that we can still choose how to talk and behave despite all we have been through.
- Opportunities for students' emotional processing also need to be calm and authentic to avoid further trauma. These could be guided conversations with trusted adults or peers, or allowing students to express their experiences creatively through writing, poetry, drawing, painting, making things with their hands, moving to or creating music, singing, dancing, drama, photography, collage or video making.
- The first few days and weeks still need some structure and using the curriculum as a base to select relevant activities is a useful place to start. Find activities relevant to students' level and readiness. Writing letters of thanks to the many people who came to help is a language arts activity, mapping the places affected is a geography activity, understanding the part played by climate change is a science activity and so on.
- Of course, it will also be important to have activities that have nothing to do with the recent or on-going traumatic events to bring balance to the school day. Regular maths lessons, stories about other times and places, health and physical education can provide a welcome respite. Ask students what they'd like to do or study.
- Eventually, school will settle into a routine of "new normal" in which students become a little more used to their changed and continually changing world but they can still experience emotional or behavioural wobbles.
- What behaviours are students exhibiting? Night-time or day wetting, nightmares, hyperactivity, aggression, withdrawal, lethargy, clinginess, anxiety, panic, loss of appetite or loss of interest in activities are all behaviours children might exhibit but most children adjust over time. Some children, however, will continue to act of of character or have prolonged symptoms and they will need professional help. Mental health issues are still apparent in disaster zones many years later and need to be taken seriously.
- Keep in touch with parents – what is happening at home? Keep each other informed and, if necessary, agree on strategies that will support the student at home and school.
- Post-disaster, schools often became the place where a community narrative of the event was constructed – partly because this was where stories were told, meetings were held and advice was given out. Schools often constructed memorial sites – plaques, mosaics, trees, gardens or seating areas. Some schools recorded the community's story in book form or documentary. Such projects have therapeutic as well as historic value and might be worth considering.
- Finally, it will be long, it will be hard, you will have ups and downs but through all this we learn to value what is precious and to face the future with renewed hope. Thank you all!

This information is supplied by Professor Carol Mutch (from the University of Auckland), a researcher in disaster response and recovery from her own work and the research and advice of other experts in the field. It is designed to provide a general overview and might need adaptation for individual circumstances.