

Supporting Students During a Flood

During and after a major flood, students often rely on teachers to help them return to a normal school routine. Given your direct relationship with students, you play an important role in supporting students and managing reactions to this year's flood.

Many of the flood response actions will be directed by your school division or administrators. It's important that you work with administrators, parents and educational resource people (ex: counsellors, psychologists, social workers) and community mental health professionals.

Children and youth are generally resilient and most will readily bounce back from the impact of a flood, especially if they have appropriate resources, and support from caring adults.

All schools must have an emergency preparedness plan to co-ordinate and respond to these events. Make sure you re-familiarize yourself with the policies and procedures.

Establish classroom routines:

- Changes to school routines and class schedules will be directed by your administrators.

However, you may need to make decisions that affect your classroom.

- Generally, returning to a normal classroom routine as quickly as possible is appropriate.

However, if students seem very unsettled, returning to a normal routine right away may not be useful. Take time to listen to your students, clarify information and facts, and then start resuming a normal classroom routine.

- Welcome relocated students to your classroom and keep an eye on them for signs of stress. Let your regular students know that relocated students have been strongly affected by the flood and may need extra support and understanding during and after the flood.

Support students:

- Be familiar with the process to access support services and refer students who need them to the appropriate support people as soon as possible.
- Children affected by the flood should be carefully observed. They may require extra support and attention. This is especially true for children who were impacted by previous floods or other traumatic events.
- Continue to share flood updates, when it's appropriate, at the beginning of the day. These updates will help counteract rumours and help students settle into their classroom routines.

Plan activities to help students deal with fears or emotional reactions. Include your students in choosing and planning these activities. Possible activities may include:

- designing cards and writing notes to people involved in the flood

- drawing pictures and displaying them on a bulletin board
- writing poems or stories for a class book about the flood
- collecting money/clothing/toys for people most affected by the flood

Adjust your classroom routines based on your students' needs:

- Every class will have different needs.
- Assess your class's needs and decide how best to deal with the flood issues and how long to continue with flood activities.
- Remember, individual student needs will vary. Refer students to support services when they need extra help.

Inform parents:

- Provide parents with information about how their children are reacting and what is being done in the classroom to deal with the flood.

Be aware that when children are stressed, their sleep patterns may be disrupted:

- Plan less intense instructional activities for a few days.
- Delay tests until students' stress levels are lowered, or they're back to normal.
- Explain how missed lessons and activities will be made up, without adding more stress.

Provide ongoing opportunities to deal with the effects of the flood:

- Let students know support people will be available if they need to talk to someone other than you or their parents. Tell students who is available and how to connect with them.
- Acknowledge and discuss feelings with your whole class and with individuals who are most affected.
- Discuss the flood in the context of other subjects (ex: weather patterns).
- Provide facts to help calm students' fears (ex: have students do classroom news updates on facts that are positive and encouraging).

Expect delayed reactions:

- Remember that if new flood issues come up, they may trigger students' feelings again.
- Remember there may be a student reaction on the anniversary of a past flood. Refer students who are affected by this to support people.
- Prepare for normal, long term reactions such as the continued need to discuss the flood.
- Watch for severe, intense, long term reactions such as:
 - persistent re-experiencing trauma (ex: intense recollections, dreams, flashbacks)
 - persistent avoidance of things associated with the trauma or the appearance of numbed responses (ex: changed mood, little interest in usual activities)
 - signs of increased anxiety (ex: sleep difficulties, irritability, hyper vigilance, poor concentration, jumpiness)

Emphasize a return to stability:

- When the flood is over, return to your original classroom schedule to provide a sense of security and comfort for your students.

If you need more information or help for your role in supporting students through the flood, contact your designated support staff.**Use outside support and resources when you need them**

If you, your family, friends or neighbours are having a hard time dealing with stress, you can get help:

- Health Links – Info Santé can help you find resources through your local regional health authority or community mental health services office. Call 204-788-8200 in Winnipeg; toll free 1-888-315-9257; 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- Manitobans can call Manitoba Farm and Rural Support Services at 1-866-367-3276 toll free; 10:00 a.m. to 9:00 p.m. weekdays. Or, go to www.ruralsupport.ca
- Clinic Community Health Centre 24-hour Crisis Line can provide counselling and referrals for all Manitobans. Call 204-786-8686 in Winnipeg; toll free 1-888-322-3019; 24 hours a day, seven days a week.
- If you or someone you know is thinking of suicide, the Manitoba Suicide Line is available to all Manitobans. Call 1-877-435-7170 toll free; 24 hours a day, seven days a week; or go to www.reasonstolive.ca.