

Be You In Focus Webinar Transcript

Supporting recovery after trauma. How a learning community can lead through protective practice.

Presented by Ruth Jones, Brad Morgan, Ben Rogers, Heidi Yelland

Ruth Jones (National Senior Clinical Project Officer, Be You)

Good afternoon, everyone. So, lovely to have you with us, joining us for our In Focus webinar (Supporting Recovery After Trauma: How a Learning Community can Lead to a Protective Practice). My name is Ruth Jones. I'm the National Senior Clinical Project Officer in the Be You team with the headspace schools' team. I'm a social worker by background, and I've been working in mental health for a little over 10 years. I moved into the Be You space about a year ago and I've just been floored by the incredible work that's being done in our learning communities, but also the crucial role schools' play towards the mental health and well-being of our young people.

I'd like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the traditional owners on the lands on which we meet. I'm sitting on the ancestral lands of the Ghana people of the Adelaide Plains. I know you're joining us from all over the country today, and I'd like to pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge and value their deep and real connection to land, kin, waters and community. If you'd like to and if you're feeling like you can, please feel free to write in the chat box, the name of the traditional lands that you're joining us from today. It's interesting to get a picture of where everyone's joining us from.

As I mentioned earlier, learning communities can play such an important role in the wellbeing of children, young people and their families. I think this has really come to fore in the last 12 months as our country has endured bushfires, ongoing droughts, and a global pandemic.

Today, we're looking at how the learning community can support recovery following a community trauma. I'm really honoured to introduce our subject matter experts today from Emerging Minds, Brad Morgan, Ben Rogers, and my colleague from headspace, working in the Be You Bushfire Recovery Program, Heidi Yelland. Brad is the Director at Emerging Minds. He leads the establishment and delivery of the National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health. He's an occupational therapist and has worked extensively in workforce development and strategy. Ben Rogers is also an occupational therapist and is currently the Manager of Community Trauma and Emerging Minds. He works with the Be You Bushfire Response program to support learning communities following the devastating 2019 and 2020 bushfires. Heidi Yelland is a Contact Liaison Officer for the Be You Bushfire Response Program and works with the headspace Be You Team. Heidi has been an educator for 25 years and has worked in a range of leadership and wellbeing positions, so we're really thrilled to have all three of you join us today. Thank you for giving up your time and expertise to join us.

For those of you that have just joined us, you can submit a question via the questions box on your control panel. We won't be able to get to all questions and we are only able to provide general answers to questions, not specific responses to individual trauma cases. We will process any questions that we can't answer today in the post webinar handout.

Before we kick off to the official kind of part of today, I think it's really important and I'd like to take a moment to remember that whenever we're talking about mental health in any context, especially trauma, it can affect us in different ways. As educators, you all come with your own unique experiences. If there's anything we cover today that may raise uncomfortable feelings: please feel free to opt out of the session, or just take a break if you need to. A copy of health services contact is available on the screen (and in the post webinar handout). I want to remind you to reach out to your own support network if necessary and your employee assistance program and of course, please contact any of the services on this health services contact infographic.

Today's session will be recorded, so you'll be able to come back and watch it at a later stage.

Some of you may be familiar with Be You which is a National initiative that looks at supporting the mental health of children and young people from birth to 18 years. Be You is an initiative that is delivered by Beyond Blue and in collaboration with Early Childhood Australia, and headspace. We really want to help you involve everyone at your early learning service or school, in supporting mental health, so that you can achieve the best possible outcomes. It's a great initiative. It's completely free, we offer interactive implementation support sessions, events and we also have accredited professional learning modules that are available online. There are also several fact sheets on a range of topics, and some fantastic planning and implementation tools. Some of them we will share today.

Our vision is simple, that every Australian early learning service and school is a positive, inclusive and resilient community where every child, young person, staff, member and parent and carer can achieve the best possible outcome.

What a lovely vision to start us off with today. That is quite enough for me. I'm going to hand it over to Brad and Ben to run through the more formal part of today and then after their presentation, we'll jump into the question and answer panel with some questions that have come through from the Question and chat box.

Just a reminder, please put your questions in the questions/chat box and hopefully we might get to some of them, but just a reminder that will they'll be revisited in the post webinar handout. So over to you, Brad.

Bradley Morgan (Director Emerging Minds)

Thanks Ruth and hi everyone. To get started today, I thought I'd just introduce what we will be talking about today. As Ruth was saying, we are looking at quite a big year for everyone in this country, but particularly for learning communities, children, and young people, with quite a number of significant global and national events. So, really, what we're wanting to look at today are the opportunities and the characteristics that education settings have to support children through a lot of these challenges that we've been going through. And then also to share some of the strategies and resources that are available for Learning Communities.

When we think about Learning communities, we're looking at, early child education, and care settings, primary schools, and secondary schools, and all the different people involved in those communities. Really looking at how we can provide support, particularly around community trauma recovery. To highlight, we will be looking at the events that have happened this year, and not looking specifically at individual trauma or individual family traumas for this particular webinar.

A bit of background behind Emerging Minds where I come from, and really looking at our connection with the Be You initiative. Be you, as you know, is really looking at educational communities and supporting children's wellbeing, young people's and educator's wellbeing. Emerging Minds is a national organization that looks at Infant Child and Young People's mental health, and one of the programs we're supported to lead from the Department of Health, is a program called the National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health.

These initiatives are operating in parallel and quite linked. When we look at our work, it's really looking at services outside of the learning communities. So, looking at health services, social services, community services, so the types of services outside of the learning community that children and families are likely to come in contact with, and we both share a vision around how do we increase national awareness and support for infant, child and young people's mental health. In response to things like experiences of trauma and adversity as well.

So, I'll just move on to the next slide and look at learning Communities. What we really wanted to highlight today is that learning communities, by their very nature, are protective and supportive of recovery. I think something that's useful for us, to remind ourselves of, quite often what nurtures good social emotional wellbeing and development in children and young people, is also what nurtures recovery from traumatic events and experiences. And something that's unique about learning communities is really, how I like to think of it is they are a developmental context, where children and young people spend a lot of time. And just the nature of that means, where we spend lots of our time, is what shapes us in our mental health and development and our recovery as well. What we really wanted to look at today and highlight to you, and I'm sure you're all aware, but just to really reinforce is, that you already are supporting recovery, and you are supporting social and emotional wellbeing because of the nature of the learning community. Things that we know support social and emotional wellbeing and recovery are things like having relationships and supportive relationships in particular, within the learning community, is having adult relationships. Someone who's looking out for us, who's thinking about us, and we've got peer relationships too. Another component of learning community's is the structure and routines that they provide. They provide an enormous amount of security for children and young people having some consistency in our routines and our daily lives. The other place, I guess, an important part of learning communities is they are a place where there is an opportunity to be safe to express our emotions and how we're feeling as well.

So today, we're really looking at lots of those different opportunities in these settings and how we can nurture them. Before we get too much into the content, I just wanted to highlight that we all have different levels of understanding and knowledge about trauma. Some of us have deep levels of understanding. Some of us have sort of had some curiosity about it and others sort of just sort of learning, just getting to know about it and hear about it. I'd like to now share a video to help us understand and be on the similar page about trauma.

Video script:

As we sail through life, we might encounter events that are adverse or traumatic. A traumatic event is a deeply distressing or disturbing experience. A traumatic experience can happen directly to a person, or it can be something they have witnessed. A traumatic experience is likely to involve either loss of life, or a threat to life, loss of liberty, or a threat to liberty, abuse, including emotional, physical, sexual abuse, or neglect, and physical harm or threat of harm. The impact of trauma can be passed down from one generation to the next.

Remember, not everyone will respond to a traumatic experience in the same way and not everyone needs to be the subject of harm or abuse to be traumatized. A witness to trauma, such as a child in a home with family violence, can be impacted by trauma. A response to trauma is not always immediate, and maybe felt many years later. Adversity can be an event, or experience, that is distressing and worrying, a misfortune or a significant change or loss, such as the death of a loved one. All of us experienced adversity in our lives at some stage, and most of the time these do not cause lasting difficulties.

However, ongoing adverse events or several adversities over a few years, which may not be considered traumatic in themselves, can have a cumulative negative impact on a developing child, and may lead to a trauma response. Adult experiences of high levels of adversity can also impact on the child parent relationship. Adversity has come from the types of challenges that occur in life from time to time.

They may occur within our homes, or they may come from outside events, such as financial crisis, natural disasters, loss of employment, or relationship breakdown. Trauma and adversity in childhood has been closely linked with negative physical, social, and mental health outcomes in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood.

Before I hand over to Ben, I just wanted to acknowledge that video is available for you to use in your groups or learning communities as well and freely available from Emerging Minds. I think it's also good to acknowledge the last 12 months and I think that pitch you saw at the end of that video with lots of little fish, sort of chewing away at boat, I think, probably reflects what we've probably been experiencing, particularly for a lot of learning communities in Australia over the last 12 months with droughts, bushfires and obviously the COVID situation as well. I'll hand over to Ben. He's going to talk a bit more about opportunities to support children in response in the learning community.

Ben Rogers (Community Trauma Manager, Emerging Minds)

Thanks Brad and thanks, Ruth. And as you can see here, we've developed a visual representation of ways that you, as an educator, can support children following a community trauma. Having worked in learning communities, I have found that it can feel quite overwhelming for educators at times knowing where to start, when supporting children's mental health. Particularly, what's been raised with me is this uncertainty of knowing exactly what's within your scope as an educator. And so, we know there's a lot of great programs and services out there that can support children. But what we're interested in today is the daily interactions that you have with children, and the things that you can do in the learning context to support their recovery. As part of that process, I'll talk about some practical ways, as an Occupational Therapist, I want to come back to ways that you can support your day-to-day functioning as an educator. But also, we want to shine a light on the things that you're doing well. This visual representation can provide a bit of a framework to help guide you through the process. To start off, I'll look at staff well-being initially, and the importance of looking after yourselves. We'll look at daily approaches, and we'll look at how you can monitor children when you're feeling like there's some vulnerabilities, and then looking at activating support as well.

Next slide. Now, before we dive into this, I want to take a moment to talk about regulation. And some of you may be aware of this term, regulation. But I find that the window of tolerance is a nice way of helping to understand what happens before and after a community trauma, or traumatic experience. So, if we cast our eyes, over to the left-hand side, for a moment, where we have a nervous system, with a nice, wide, kind of green zone, where we're quite regulated in that green zone. Hopefully, that's how most of you are feeling today, watching this webinar. It's when we're in a state of balance. Our pre-frontal cortex, our thinking brain, is online and we're able to think, to reason, reflect and importantly, socially engage with those around us. But at times, naturally, we can move into a hyper aroused state, so an under responsive system, where we can start to feel more zoned out, more spacey. And in terms of extreme stress, we can move into a shutdown response, as well. Then the dreaded red zone that everyone talks about, that's when we're in a hypo aroused state where the amygdala, the limbic system kind of area of the brain takes over. The fuel that's pumped through our body is that cortisol and adrenaline. Certain behaviours that we might show when we're in those states, and we all can relate to this. When we're feeling heightened, we're edgier, more agitated and reactive, and things like that. But let's just take a moment to think about the concept of the window of tolerance, because our nervous systems built in a way to tolerate things and daily stresses. It might be tricky conversation you've had with a parent. It might be some challenging behaviour in the classroom. Or even just, you know, the feeling of after lunch lessons when the kids are bouncing off the walls. Naturally, our nervous system is built to have a threshold or window that can tolerate these things.

What happens as part of a community trauma, is that our number one operating system in our body, our nervous system, is around safety. And when it's questioned, like in a community trauma, it can have a significant impact on the stress levels which happen over a sustained period of time.

I think this is really important for us to just stop and think about for a moment, because with community trauma, our whole kind of questioning of safety in our body is it's changed, and it's really hard for it to switch off. And what happens over a period of time is the body is filled with a state of toxic stress which narrowly shortens or shrinks our window of tolerance. This is a very complex neurological process, but hopefully we can understand why particularly the stress of this year, thinking about, you know, an invisible virus, that's kind of cast over our communities, as well as Bush Fires, and other kind of floods and community traumas why this concept is so important for us to take note off. And I'm going to just reference this as we go along, to help make sense of it a little bit more.

Next slide. So, staff well-being. It's a big area, a very important area for us to take note of at the moment. The learning community is a crucial hub for children and young people as part of the recovery process. We know that children and young people naturally attune to the emotions of key adults around them, even for you listening to the sound of my voice and looking at my facial expressions, you're resonating and feeling something yourself, even through watching a webinar. And, I think this is important, that we don't have to say words to resonate how we're actually feeling, it's throughout affect, our tone of voice, our body posture and kids and young people really do pick this up! And this can be a great thing, I think, when we're feeling regulated and in that green zone, where we can naturally coregulate with those around us. But I think where this can have some detrimental effect is when we're in that heightened state, that red zone that I referenced before, where kids and young people can naturally feel that as well. And particularly, we know that in order to provide a safe, secure, and supportive environment, which we know is so important for children in recovery, it's important that you find ways of looking after yourself. As I said, this is a really important topic area and Be You actually had a webinar that was released on Educator Wellbeing last month (if you're curious to learn more in depth) But just to touch on this for a moment, the first thing you can really try is check in with yourself throughout the day. So, notice, if you are increasing in your arousal at all and moving into that red zone and to find ways, or self-care, some access points where you can use to help regulate yourself. I think this is a key thing, isn't it? Around self-care, because self-care can often be looked at as a segment in your day. So, you know, I'd go for my walk in the morning, or I might go to the gym in the afternoon. But if we can find, though, and they're very important aspects of self-care definitely, however if we can find those micro moments in our day to alleviate that stress to regulate ourselves, it can have a lasting impact for us. And a good way of thinking about this, at a visual representation is thinking of stress, our own stress, like a cup and throughout the day, it kind of floods in to the point where, on those very extremely stressful days, it overflows and we've become really heightened. And if we can find those moments in the day to take a deep breath, to find a tool that can regulate us, it can have a big impact. I know for me, a beacon for me is noticing tightness in my chest when I'm becoming stressed. I use getting a drink of water as a very kind of practical point to check in with myself. And sometimes, I might be filling out my drink bottle and notice that tightness and just take a couple of deep breaths, which can help ground me. So, take a moment, now, before we go onto the next slide, just think about what they are for you, but also to acknowledge that there's supports in place that can help you with that work, whether that's colleagues, or family or ongoing supports through mental health services.

Let's look at daily approaches, and I'm sure you're all curious about this. You know, what can I do as an educator to support children? I guess I want to start with that point of relationships and relationships we all know is so important. Connection is a key component of supporting children, following a community trauma. And for many children that, it's the changes in their family contexts that have lasting impacts on them following a natural disaster or a community trauma. It's the parental separation, it's the financial stress, it's the moving house. And we know that educators have a really important role in being a consistent person for children and young people. A person that can listen, can acknowledge their experiences, a person who can validate how they're feeling. I just really want to take note of those interactions and acknowledge the impact they can have, they may seem small, but those interactions you have with children and just being a presence in their life, really does impact their psychological and physiological wellbeing.

Often when I talk to educators about this, it's that kind of feeling that it's a struggle to really get to all the kids in the classroom and knowing where to start with this kind of approach. One thing I've found useful is the 2 by 10 principle. And this is an approach where, if you're having any challenges with a child in the classroom, or you're struggling to connect with a child, spending two minutes for 10 days in a row and just pull up a chair for that two minutes and follow the conversation with the child. Follow their lead and wherever they take it. That might seem unusual at first. It's quite unusual to follow the child's lead. But by positioning them as the expert of their own life, they can take you on a journey of their own experience. And if you're there listening to that, if you're the kind of holding that safely, just through nodding and smiling and saying, I'm here, I'm listening, it can over a few days, really change the fabric of that relationship overall. I think it's the reciprocity of sharing and greeting that can really help with that and we find that over 10 days, there is some change, but also that can continue, in terms of the pattern that you have together.

I wanted to take note of the second point, routine. Following community trauma, the nervous system is really set into overdrive. To remind you, the number one operating system for our body and our nervous system is to keep us safe and it will override everything else. Learning, cognition, social engagement, it's really about safety. And when there's a flood, when there's a bushfire, as I said earlier, an invisible virus like COVID floating around, it makes it hard for children, young people, and even adults to trust our environment. That routine sets up that familiarity and that predictability, which, over time, allows a child to find a pattern that they can trust. And just to note, this is a huge strength of learning communities and educators as well.

The fourth point, and I'll try not to get too passionate about this, the third point here, movement, as an Occupational Therapist. That's something that we really do encourage. The body will naturally find ways of regulating itself. You know, I'm here doing a presentation, I can't see any of your faces but I'm trying to regulate myself by slightly turning in my chair. And the body will naturally do things that will help it to feel calm and in that green zone that I referenced. Particularly movement through the muscles in the joints so the proprioceptive system in the body. So find ways of feeding that need, find short movement breaks in the day that can help children and young people move back into that window of tolerance. And again, you know, this doesn't have to be a complex movement. Chair push ups are a great example for children and young people where you can do it in your chair just by having your hand underneath the chair and pushing up and down off the chair. This can be a really fun and engaging way to get movement while not leaving the classroom or your chair as well. You can tune into that yourselves about movement, and what you can incorporate into your day.

The final point there is around emotional regulation. This is a really important point, because we need to find ways of supporting children's emotions following community trauma. And what we know is that behaviour is often shown in the form of communication where there's some deep emotions there. We can naturally feel heightened when there is emotion shared. So acknowledge that for yourself. But simply by connecting with whatever's present with you in that child can have important impacts for them processing those emotions.

So if a child's sad, you know, finding ways of connecting with them in an empathetic way around that, or naming that emotion, it can naturally help to regulate it. I think that's a good thing for you to be curious about yourselves. And I think noticing that, even if you can name an emotion in yourself, when you're feeling something, it can help to what they say down regulate that emotion, as well.

Another approach, which is crucial for children, is learning their own tools to self-regulate. Something like mindfulness is a good approach that can help children to be with emotions, as well as choosing their tools, like the breath to support their own regulation.

The next slide we're going to look at is monitoring. Educators have a key position in monitoring children's mental health following a community trauma and particularly identifying children who have ongoing difficulties. A good way of thinking about this is looking at child mental health on a continuum. So we're down one end of the continuum is positive mental health, where most children do sit within.

But as certain vulnerabilities happen, whether that developmental or certain adversities in their life, children can have certain vulnerabilities which impact them and potentially might cause some function difficulties in one aspect of their life. But children can also move down to the furthest end of that continuum, where there's more pervasive and persistent symptoms that affect them across multiple contexts at school, home, and in the community. So just being aware that this is dynamic for children and they move up and down throughout, throughout their life and in particular in the context of community trauma, it becomes important that educators have tools that they can use to observe that.

The **BETLES tool**, the observation tool through Be You, is a great tool that a lot of learning communities have found, and educators have found effective. It stands for looking at the behaviour, is looking at emotions, looking at thoughts, looking at learning and social engagement. I know that's a lot of words, and it could sound like that's overwhelming, but it's quite a simple tool that you can use to help map out changes in behaviour. As well as looking at kind of what certain triggers might be there in the environment or what helps to support that child's mental health as well. I know there's a link to this in the show notes as well. Over to you, Brad to look at activating support.

Bradley Morgan (Director Emerging Minds)

Thanks for that, Ben. And I think just building on what Ben's been talking about, particularly around the unique role educators and people in the learning community have in really understanding how children are going in their daily life in the learning community, one of the things that might need to happen, is you might need to find extra help and support for the child or young person. This is often what we hear is quite a challenge for educators. I think, from a whole range of professions, that seems to be quite a challenge. One of the things that can be quite tricky is knowing where to go and who to connect with for different types of issues and support. Something that's really important in this sort of thing, is that knowledge and wisdom that you have been able to gather around the young person, it's something we look at and what Ben was highlighting there, is you do have a unique opportunity in monitoring children over time and understanding, you know, things are changing. They might be slow changes that you might have sort of reflected on the things have changed over the last few months, or it might be something quite significant and change quickly. So some of the things that we really encourage in relation to activating support is using that wisdom and knowledge that you have. I tend to think of this sort of thing is when you're activating support is thinking about how do you get, the situational experts or people who know what's happening together, to be able to share that knowledge around. What do we need to do? What are the contexts that it's happening in? In the context of if a child or a young person you're observing was struggling, really, the first step is really being curious. You will have your observations and notes and understandings of what's happening. The next step is to decide if this is just happening in the classroom, or is this happening elsewhere? How do you find out a bit more about that is, in one instance, it might be talking to the young person saying, I've just noticed these things that are happening and some of these changes. And what you're seeking to explore and being able to activate that support is understand what their perspective is on it, and what the context of what you might have observed, and if they share those observations. The other part of being curious is, where possible, is really trying to connect with and collaborate with parents around. What Ben was mentioning before, is this something that's just happening in the school context? Or is this happening at home? Or is this happening in other places as well? Or it might be other way around where you haven't made observations at all. Thinking maybe they're going well at school, but maybe parents have come to you saying, we just know these things are happening at home and we're just wondering if you've got the same sort of experience. The real idea around activating support is to be able to share each other's wisdom around what to do next and problem solve a plan together, around what might be the next steps. I think quite often, we want to automatically jump to getting, you know, really specialist support. And sometimes, that is important and necessary.

But other times, particularly looking at the mental health continuum, there can be things that can be done even just in your relationship or in your room or even just sort of sharing information that can really be prevention support.

So, this might be stepping in early and going yeah, let's just do some simple problem-solving things here and now and what they can do to prevent things from getting worse. Then there's other times when you might need to really do activate specialist support and those support are places where you might go and schools and really have access to those, things like, you know, headspace supports for young people, going to the general practice, most areas have access to things like child adolescent mental health services. So, those sorts of supports are there, but I think sometimes it's we often jump straight to them rather than thinking about what other things can be offered in the first instance and moving towards them. Some of the things I think are useful is thinking about what types of support are useful? Sometimes that can be just providing information. Having access to that information, as you would all have access to, is lots of different tools and things that you find useful. For some people, that just gives information to help them maybe even help understand if it is, or whether it is a problem or a challenge. Other sorts of support that can be offered is, you know, for some people, they might just need some extra tips or tools that might be there. And I sort of think that those are self-directed strategies. So, things like apps and fact sheets or guides that are available. And you can make available to families and young people as well. The other types of support that are available is thinking about activating support networks and support networks I tend to think of as our natural supports and how do you communicate and help them to understand that this is something that we're worried about and we're wondering if you could help us with this? That might be, you know, family, friends, those sorts of things or in the learning community, it might be other colleagues and things as well that you can activate. But it can also be more specialists supports if that is what is needed as well. So helping people go to the GP and helping them prepare for that. Maybe helping them prepare and connect with a service or if you've got access to counsellors or school support services as well, just looking at how that can be activated. Something that's important through that whole process, as I was mentioning before, is if possible, trying to collaborate with the network. So that could be a young person. It could be that parents, it could be the child. Helping them to set an agenda around, what is the challenge we were experiencing here. What are we worried about? But also, to acknowledge the strengths in that space as well. The idea is always trying to look at how do we empower people to find the support they need and activate the support they need and that includes supporting young people to do that, as well.

To give you a bit of a quick orientation, I thought might be useful to take away from today. Just some tools that are available for you, that might assist when helping you and your understanding and sort of thinking about how you might feel more confident responding to trauma. The first thing I'll share with you, is similar to the Be You initiative, Emerging Minds also has a range of online learning materials. A lot of our work is really looking at those that work in health and social services and if you're looking at learning community, we know that it's counsellors and other people that are involved, like speech pathologist, occupational therapists that get connected and so a lot of the work we've got, there's a lot of tools that will help those sorts of groups. In our learning, we have designed to focus on where you work, really matters for what role you play. So, if you log into our system, you'll sort of see there's a different option to say, if I'm an educator, there is a specific set of courses for you. If I'm working in child protection, there's another different set of courses for you, as well. And all of those are aimed to help initially build some understanding of what is child mental health and social emotional wellbeing? What is trauma? How do I engage and communicate in trauma sensitive ways? And then, depending on where you work, would then look at the different types of scope of practice. So, for people that aren't working in health and social services, we don't expect you to be delivering interventions. But there's things that you can do, like sharing information, and tools like that that can help you do that. Or how to have a conversation with a child or a young person, or how to talk with parents. That's something that's available for free and will be available if you want to use it and you can share it with your teams.

The other resources I wanted to share with you as well, is particularly relevant for this work, is a community trauma toolkit. That's also freely available and this has been released in the last, just before the bushfires. So it's been around for about 12 to 18 months.

This toolkit was designed in response to a recognition, that often children being a bit invisible, in the context of natural disasters or community traumas and a real need to create a central place where people can access materials that help them in their response to children and young people. The way the toolkit is designed is what we know from community trauma, is that there's some common principles irrespective of the trauma. It could be a bushfire; it could be a flood. It could be terrorism or community violence that we've been exposed to or in the context of now looking at a pandemic. Common principles apply across all of those things. So what Ben was talking about today, those sorts of principles can apply, irrespective of the nature of the trauma. Obviously, there's different explanations and things that come across with all those, but really, this toolkit is aiming to do that. We've designed it both to be responsive and targeted for different groups, which you can see on there. So, educators, general practitioners, health and social services and there's a suite of resources, which can include things like workshop presentations and minutes that you can use yourselves. So running a workshop, podcast, factsheets those sorts of things and they're designed around looking at preparedness, getting ready. If you live in an area where there is bushfires or cyclones, getting ready to respond to the immediate. So, when we talk about immediate it is when it's happening, or in the days after. And then short-term responses, which is seen as a few weeks afterwards and then, in a long term, which can be the months and years, that follow that. There's lots of resources available there for those different audiences.

And the other resources that are available on the Emerging Minds website that I'd thought I'll just draw some attention to, there's lots here, but some resources that you might like to share with parents, families, and carers. Ones that I wanted to draw your attention to, in particular are the fact sheets and in the context of now; we've got some fact sheets on, you know, as a parent "How do I talk about what's happening?" So that at home within relation to COVID and parenting and what's changed in our family? These resources help guide discussions.

The other tool that we've shared with a lot of families and educators who are sharing it with families, is an app that we've developed called **Child 360**. It's a simple tool that, I guess what we've heard from parents and also from professionals is, it can be quite tricky to be able to unpack what's happening for children and what's always happening in children and there's the range of strengths and there's a range of things that we might be worried about. It helps to simplify and think about and reflect on, you know, things aren't going so well here, but they're going OK, here. What do I need to do to activate support? It reflects what I said similar in the first instance; it might be that I just want more information. It helps you find more information on that topic. It might also be that now, I might need to talk to someone. It provides information on who to contact around this issue. Or if it's something that is of concern, it actually can generate a bit of an agenda or a letter that you can take to your GP or a child maternal health nurse, or whoever it is you're seeking support from to really help frame an agenda for when I have my appointment. "These are the things I'm really worried about and would like further discussion with". So, that's just something I think we've been sharing with parents and educators have said, it's been a really good tool to help parents really reflect on what's happening for their children as well and seek the help that they need.

And there's another one that we're just about to release, which is called **When I'm away**. It's really for parents to set up plans for when they might be separated from their children for a few days, which might be planned or it might also be when it's unplanned and how do we communicate the information about how our children are going and what they need to other people who might be responsible for looking after them as well.

And is finishing up the more presentation part of the presentation today.

Just reflecting on what's been covered, what Ben's been talking through and what I've been able to share is something we really wanted to get across to learning communities is really recognizing that support for children following Community trauma isn't only about programs and specialists and I think that's just really reinforcing how important learning communities for children's recovery. I think quite often, we pay a lot of attention to activating all the specialist supports that you might get from, you know, allied health professionals and medical professionals.

But I really want to highlight that the most important actions that happen to support recovery, are those that become integrated in the everyday life of children and in particular, as in the context of your role is those that occur in everyday life of the learning community. They don't need to be sort of big and extensive magical things, I think, has been sort of talking about. It's just those moments in everyday learning and in the community, to make a real big difference to our recovery. But also to highlight, you have a unique role in being able to understand how children are progressing over time. There is not many other relationships in a child or young person's life, which is consistent and continuing over time and so, for that reason, you do have that really unique opportunity to know how children are progressing and the changes that happen over a few weeks, a month, a year. And that's a really important role that you play.

PANEL session:

[Ruth Jones \(National Senior Clinical Project Officer, Be You\)](#)

Thank you so much, Brad and Ben, it was just so informative, but I really love that take home message we don't need those complicated or expensive, even outside programs. Just sometimes what educators are no doubt doing on a day-to-day basis, that's so supportive, in just those small, kind of everyday actions. I really like that take home message. I'm conscious of time and that we've had some great questions come through in the questions/chat box. So we will get straight to some of those. Heidi, hope you don't mind, I'm going to go through straight to you for this question. **How do we support students returning to school?**

[Heidi Yelland \(Community Liaison Officer, Be You\)](#)

It's reiterating that point of that Ben made about just having that safe and welcoming space. A classroom needs to feel safe. So don't underestimate the power of a smile as a teacher, listen with interest, interact with your students. Teachers could be also good role models in staying calm and steady. And if you are feeling heightened, ask for help. Acknowledge that students know that they're feeling loss and fear, and provide reassurance that their thoughts are normal, and things get better over time. It's also good to provide students with a safe space to talk, and that can be in a class environmental, one-on-one. Some may not want to talk, and they might like to just express themselves in different ways and that could be writing, drama, music, art. And for young children, that could be through creative play, the routines are important as well. So, maintaining those, strong routines. The students of Strathewen primary school who lost their school life in the Black Saturday fires. They set up their school and a makeshift classroom in a neighbouring school. They wanted their readers, they wanted spelling lists. It's that normal known to them, you know, there's so much security in routines. In classrooms, have their classroom schedule displayed and if things need to be changed then discuss that with the students. It is good to have a yard roster on display in the classroom, so children can have that safe person to find on yard duty if they need it. For older students giving plenty of notice, notice for assignments, true and tests and that sort of thing. You might need to give that message in a number of different ways like emails, verbal. And just reiterating Ben and Brad's point about monitoring students' behaviour that's an activating support and then Notice, Inquire, Provide modules in the Be You Framework is valuable, and that Be You BETLES tool to record those observed behaviours.

Ruth Jones (National Senior Clinical Project Officer, Be You)

Thanks Heidi, just those simple reminders about how important a routine can be and just how safe that can be for young people, as well. I'm going to throw this next question to you Ben, because I think it's actually just so relevant, I suppose with what we're all navigating at the moment, **How can we stay connected as a community, during prolonged periods of social distancing and loss of human contact?**

Ben Rogers (Community Trauma Manager, Emerging Minds)

Yeah, it's a great question Ruth. It's kind of counter-intuitive for the body isn't it? What we've had to go through and the nervous system because we were innately built to connect with each other and we rely on the kind of, as I talked about, the reciprocity of sharing and it's energizing for us most of the time. And yet when we're disconnected, it's finding those ways to connect. And that can happen in a couple of different ways. I guess the prosody of our voice is one of those and how, no matter, even if you're using video conferencing with kids, I know most schools are going back at the moment. However, we can connect through the tone of our voice. Even our affect and expression, can help connect with each other. Things like e-mail, and texting and writing is a bit tricky, because you miss out on all the social cues but, I think finding the ways that we can connect is obviously a strengths based approach, but acknowledging that it's a tough time. You know, it's unprecedented what we've gone through and going through, so staying as connected to those that you can connect with, is another approach that you can draw on. Probably could talk more on that, but I think that's probably a good starting place.

Ruth Jones (National Senior Clinical Project Officer, Be You)

Yeah, that's a very big question isn't it and we could spend another whole In Focus on that one just alone. Brad, this is one that, again is a bigger question and I'm wondering who would be able to answer it in a succinct way. **What about the adults who have suffered immense trauma? For example, the teacher and if they are triggered, how can they hold it together?**

Bradley Morgan (Director Emerging Minds)

As you said, is a very big question and something I draw from, is a lot of lessons we've learned from the work we've done, particularly parents with mental illness as well. And from a first perspective is, of course, it's OK, and that's expected that you would have experienced some of this, and you would be triggered by this. Firstly, is just to be kind to yourself. And actually say to yourself, that's actually OK for me to feel that way. Because I think often, we get quite caught up in guilt. In relation to our role in supporting children and young people, think about what the experience of what the young person, or the child or young person has experienced in relation to you know, If you aren't feeling so good, I would go... yep, when I'm tired or stressed, I tend to be a bit grumpier, a bit quieter, or be angrier or my fuse is a bit shorter. And sometimes, um, that results in me, for example, not being and relating to people the way I want to. For children and young people, this is something they are particularly sensitive to, our anger and hostility. So, particularly, when we're stressed that something that I'd say is particularly sensitive. And it's not to say that I think children and probably been exposed to a lot of family hostility this year. Just because the nature of what we have been through, but to actually be kind to forgive ourselves for that sort of work. But it's not to just stop there and forgive ourselves, it's actually to pay attention to how do I repair what's been done. And, for us, as adults, we can take leadership in relationships and model to children that, you know, sometimes we do damage relationships when we haven't been behaving or relating to people in a way that we probably want to be.

And so, sort of explaining that sometimes, and that can be as simple as, you know, when I have been grumpy with my kids, because I've had a bad day at work and I'm burnt out. Is just explaining to them, I'm sorry, I was a bit grumpy, yesterday. It's not what you've done. It's just, that I had a tough day. It's the same, I think, as adults, if we can take that opportunity. It's what I call good emotional literacy building in and of itself, is, you know, as an educator, you might have had a really bad day. You might have just been a bit grumpier that day with one child in the whole classroom. And every now and then, it might actually be OK to say and model that. Yes. Sorry about that morning session, I just had a stressful start to the day and I'm going to try, I've had a bit of a break, and now I'm sort of trying to work on that. It's actually labelling that for them, we want children to do this as well, because that's good for repairing those relationships. For children, it helps them make sense of, you know, when adults are a bit different. And that's as important for them in their own development because children tend to absorb that and blame themselves. I think that's something that what we can do to buffer against some of that internalizing, I guess you'd call, what they've seen around them is to help them just make sense of that as well.

Also what Ben has been saying today, is just checking in. I think some of the cues to think about it's also the language we use sometimes when we are tired and stressed, we often use more extreme language or express, you know, what might be grey might be black and white. So just being conscious of the language you can use in that space as well.

Ruth Jones (National Senior Clinical Project Officer, Be You)

It speaks to the power that you can repair after, I think that's so true for children and young people, isn't it that even if they've been dysregulated, they can repair that and come back and join their classmates or join the room. The power of that repair work is so important. Heidi, we've got time for one more question. **What are some practical strategies to support kids who are impacted by trauma in the classroom?**

Heidi Yelland (Community Liaison Officer, Be You)

OK, so it's really great for them to have a designated space to have that timeout, to regain that emotional control and that can be a staff reception room, or a breakout room or a corner of the classroom with cushions, where you know they can just have a moment and gather their thoughts before they come back and join the classroom. It's good to maintain firm limits and expectations of behaviour. Just because there's been trauma doesn't mean that that needs to change. The stop, think, do model, that's been around for years, is a great tool to use for trauma affected students. Empowering the students with student voice and getting them to have to be a part of the curriculum, and not just in the classroom meetings but provide choices, is, you know, really engaging and a proactive way to keep them feeling as though, you know, they're part of their class and are important. Understand, also, that trauma can affect concentration. So, with time, it might just mean lessons may need to be adjusted, have clear expectations, which most teachers would anyway break the task down and scaffold those tasks well. Varying the mode of working, like in pairs or in groups, have quiet time and have interactive time, just to keep those levels of concentration higher, pitched the lessons, so that the challenging, but achievable, much more achievable. Give supportive and clear feedback, which teachers do well anyway. Introducing Brain Breaks, which are great when primary school teachers use them, really well, by energizing, dancing, singing, yoga, or run a walk outside, or the calming Brain Breaks, where you can do a Smiling Mind session or some guided deep breathing and preparing the students for those times where they might be triggered. So, after a community trauma like a bushfire that might be fire drills, which, you know, schools are legally mandated to hold, rather than just having the fire drill, having a lesson beforehand and discussing what they might hear and see and feel, and what sort of inner dialog could they have when are feeling heightened with that fire drill. Like, I'm safe, I'm here with my class.

You know, just preparing them beforehand is important. And even the first couple of fire drills, rather than having a fire drill on a Friday, and you don't know when it's coming. So the first one, maybe have it at a set time so that they know, and that element of surprise is taken away.

And focusing on the strengths and positives of the students and reinforcing great behaviours and recognizing when they're being resilient and managing their emotions and problem solving and being kind to others. And in the context of a community trauma, it's so important to celebrate the helpers rather than focusing on the devastation, celebrating the helpers, CSF volunteers, the police, the medical staff. And prioritising self-care for educators is super, super important.

Ruth Jones (National Senior Clinical Project Officer, Be You)

Very important, isn't it? That's one of our big key, take home messages. I just would really like to thank the three of you. Thank you so much for all your time, energy and insight into this topic. I know that many of us know that there's a lot of work that goes on behind the scenes to get an In Focus like this up and running. So I really appreciate all the effort, time, energy, and especially the time that you've put in. So, thank you so much for sharing your expertise today.

I know we are quickly running out of time, so I just wanted to really touch on a couple of the Be You resources that we've spoken about today. So, in the Resources tab on the website, there's some fantastic fact sheets that you can go to. I spoke about them earlier and they have some specific topics that you can download, if you don't want to go through the whole module. They are a great way to even have a discussion as a staff group.

Really importantly, Heidi, Ben and Brad spoke about it. We really want to emphasize educator wellbeing as well. The website's clearly broken down into, a wellbeing tools for you section, and it's clearly broken down into how you can get information. Some apps or activities that you might want to practice to promote wellbeing for you, but also importantly, where you can also seek help to communicate, in terms of that communication, and taking that a step further. If you are looking to have a bit more information about what resources are on offer, or you'd like to kind of get a bit more information about you, Be You, I'd really encourage you to jump on the website. I really can't stress enough that you've got a Be You consultant there, too, for you to be able to access. And they're a great resource just to be able to show you through the website. Show you what tools and resources are available, but also help you, I suppose, tailor it to your own learning community needs and what might be useful for your community might not necessarily be useful for another learning community. So that consultant can really help you navigate all those different nuances.

Thank you so much for your time. I really know you have precious educators time is and it's the end of the day, so thank you for joining us. You will get a certificate for participating in today's webinar, and a post webinar e-mail with all the resources that we've shared today. The webinar recording will be on the website in about two weeks. Also, checkout the Emerging Minds website and look at some of those resources that Brad and Ben have talked about. Thank you so much for joining us and have a wonderful Thursday evening.

END TRANSCRIPT