

Joel and the storm



PHOENIX
AUSTRALIA

Centre for Posttraumatic
Mental Health

A story for children who
have experienced trauma



Hi, my name is Joel.

I am 9 years old. I want to tell
you what happened to me when
a really bad storm went through
my town eight months ago.
It was really scary.

The wind lifted the roof off the house. All my toys and clothes and books got flung all over the place. I lost my favourite racing car set and my pet dog Robbo ran away. Robbo never came home. Mum and Dad said that they think something horrible may have happened to Robbo. That he got caught in the river and died. My family and I made a little garden bed with a cross in the backyard as a memorial to Robbo. Now I often go there to sit and talk to him and tell him what has been happening.

Since the storm, I have had trouble sleeping.

Sometimes I have really bad dreams about Robbo in the river. **I feel sick in the stomach most days.** I used to like school, but now I find it really hard to concentrate. Sometimes I get really angry and upset when I can't do things. I just feel like I want to explode like a volcano. Mum tells me off because I am always arguing with my baby sister, Jennie. I don't really know why I do it – she just really bugs me because she cries all the time and always wants to be near Mum. **I don't play with my friends much anymore – I prefer to be on my own so other kids won't talk to me about the storm.**



My dad has been away from home a lot since the storm. He has to work a lot to get more money so we can replace all the things that we lost.

I really miss having Dad around, but he told me that “I have to be the man of the house while he is away”. So I try really hard to do all my jobs and look after Mum and my baby sister.

One day Mum asked if she could talk to me. She asked me how I was going. I didn't really say anything at first because I didn't want to upset her. But she kept talking about the things that had changed since the storm.

She told me that she was worried about me.

She said she wanted the whole family to look after each other so that we can all start to feel safe again and get back to doing fun things.

Mum said that we were all going off to see a different type of doctor, a counsellor, who can help us to talk about the scary things that happened to us in the storm. She says that this will help to make them not be scary anymore.



The counsellor said that after a really scary thing has happened, some children and adults can have problems like nightmares or bad memories and feel upset and angry all the time. They might feel scared that another bad thing is going to happen to them and so they stop doing things that are fun. **The counsellor said that this is called posttraumatic stress disorder, or PTSD. I thought it sounded just like me.**

I have been to see the counsellor six times now. Sometimes the whole family goes and sometimes it is just me on my own. I do drawings and make things, and sometimes we play games, **but mostly we talk.** I didn't like going at first, but now I can't wait to go.

I always feel much better after I have talked about what I am thinking and feeling.

The counsellor has taught me ways to feel calm when I get upset, and I use them all the time now. They really work. Best of all, I don't have bad dreams anymore, and my stomach isn't feeling sick anymore. **School work seems to be getting easier to do and I am having a lot more fun playing with my friends again.**

I'm glad Mum took us to get help.

Things I can do to help myself.

Some things to try when you are upset.

Things I can do to feel better

1. Talk about my problem with a friend or trusted adult
2. Play with my friends
3. Listen to my favourite music
4. Ask a trusted adult or a friend for a hug
5. Do some exercise with a friend or family member (running, dancing to music, riding my bike, going for a walk)
6. Make something by cutting and pasting, drawing, painting, sewing, knitting or cooking
7. Have a warm bath
8. Do a quick relaxation exercise
9. Write in my diary
10. Use positive self-talk

Positive self-talk

Sometimes the thoughts in our heads make us feel happy, but sometimes they can make us feel sad, angry, worried or stressed. Positive self-talk helps to chase these unhelpful thoughts away so we can feel less stressed. If you are thinking about something scary that happened, or are worried that something bad might happen, try using positive self-talk to make you feel better.

I am safe now.

I was strong to survive that.

I have people who can help me.

I have done a lot of things well before - I'm sure I can again!



Quick relaxation exercises

Calm breathing

1. Sit in a chair or lie on the floor
2. Take a breath in through your nose and count to 3 and imagine a happy colour
3. Breathe out through your mouth and say the word 'calm' to yourself
4. Repeat this 10 times

Imagine a happy place

1. Imagine a calm and happy place
2. Tell yourself what you can see, hear, smell and feel in this happy place
3. Practise your calm breathing whilst you are picturing your happy place

Quick muscle relaxation

1. Hold your arms above your head – feel the tension in them – now drop your arms down by your side and feel them relax
2. Practise tensing and then relaxing muscles in your hands, legs, face, and stomach, and wherever else you feel stress

Ask your Mum or Dad to help you choose one or two of these things to try out.

Put a smile on my face
and colour me in.





Bye bye.

This guide is a companion document to the *Australian Guidelines for the Treatment of Acute Stress Disorder and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder*. The Guidelines were approved by the National Health and Medical Research Council, July 2013.

The complete Guidelines, a brief summary booklet, and resources for people affected by acute stress disorder or posttraumatic stress disorder, are available online: www.phoenixaustralia.org

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