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Picture: FRIDAY ONLINE PHOTOGRAPHY

CHRISTCHURCH



JAPAN



This young Templestowe boy is one of many Manningham children struggling with anxiety after being inundated with images of natural disasters.

Picture: MICHELLE KELCEY N41D13 JF

Troubled little souls

Health | Anna Prytz

Children upset by disaster overload

An outbreak of stress, anxiety and trauma among Manningham children is being blamed on the recent succession of natural disasters in Australia and abroad. Local schools say many youngsters have been deeply upset by the vastating floods in Queensland and Victoria, the earthquake in Christchurch and earthquake and tsunami in Japan. Child welfare agency Doncare says the phenomena has exposed the

need for a child-specific counsellor in the area. One Templestowe mother said her five-year-old had been so distressed by the disasters he hyperventilated at the thought of going outside in the rain. "He won't dare go outside even if it's just overcast," she said. "He's anxious all the time. He thinks there'll be a flood and he'll drown

or trees will come down, that somehow we'll all be hurt. "With winter coming, he watches the weather every day and it's a struggle to get him out. "We don't know what to do any more." Watching her son rock back and forth, cry and scream in drizzly or even windy weather was "heart-breaking," she said. St Charles

Borromeo Primary School student wellbeing leader Sue Cahill said there had been a sudden increase in children displaying "symptoms of generalised anxiety" at the Templestowe school. "It was one tragedy after another and it's become too much for them," Ms Cahill said. She said there were long waiting lists for child psychologists in Man-

ningham. "At school, we have strategies in place to manage it as best we can but there's a need for acute intervention by a professional." Doncare chief executive Doreen Stoves said similar stories were unfolding Manningham-wide. "These natural disasters are just another cause of trauma that we're seeing a lot in children," Ms Stoves said. "There's a real need for better resources to help them cope." **► Tips for parents, p8**