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Media Release

Scared and Sleepless: Children viewing media coverage of natural disasters

The Australian Council for Children and the Media (ACCM), today joined with many community organisations in extending their sympathy to those who have suffered the terrible loss of loved ones and property during the Queensland floods and Cyclone Yasi. However, they issued a strong reminder to parents of children who live in areas unaffected by these events that children could become quite anxious and distressed if they were repeatedly exposed to some of the dramatic footage being shown on TV news and current affairs programs.

Dr. Wayne Warburton, Child Psychologist and spokesperson for ACCM said: 'Very young children are particularly vulnerable to scary visual images, and when certain footage is repeated many times, they are likely to think the event is actually happening over and over again. Older children will be upset by the fact that the people affected look just like them and their families. Stories of children being injured or separated from their parents, the death of family pets and interviews with emotionally distraught or shocked adults and children can make their world feel more unsafe than it really is.'

ACCM is a national community organisation with a strong interest and expertise in the role that media experiences play in the development of Australian children. It is committed to promoting healthy choices and stronger voices in children's media.

On March 1, 2011, in conjunction with the Children and Families Research Centre at Macquarie University, they are presenting a conference called 'Scared, sleepless and hostile: children, violent/frightening media and public policy'. This conference will be of interest to educators, public health workers, government advisors and managers and academics that work with children.

Overall the conference will focus on violent and frightening media, impacts on children's sleep and anxiety levels, and policy responses including evidence-based classification systems. Speakers include Dr Douglas Gentile, Dr John Murray and Prof Ed Donnerstein from the US, and Australians Prof. Wayne Warburton, Dr. Sarah Blunden, Mr Richard Eckersley, and Prof. Elizabeth Handsley.

For more information on children and the media please contact ACCM on 08 8376 2111. For more information on the conference and speakers please visit www.childrenandmedia.org.au.

For all media enquiries please call 08 8376 2111, and/or Wayne Warburton on 02 9850 7257 or 9850 8643, or Prof Elizabeth Handsley 08 8201 5256 or 0448 898 185