



Bushfires response: Resources for educators

A resource pack for educators, families and community members to help manage the mental health impact of the bushfire crisis.

Updated: 20 January 2020

Be You resource pack: Bushfires response

What is the purpose of the resource pack?

The bushfires in Australia have had a significant impact on the country. Many schools and early learning services have been directly affected, but we know there are also many children and young people who have been indirectly exposed to the crisis.

Be You has developed a resource pack for schools and early learning services affected by this event. The resource pack focuses on providing information related to mental health and wellbeing for learning communities.

We know this is an incredibly difficult time for many people in our community. While the physical impact of the crisis is obvious, the mental health impact may not be, and will be experienced differently by people. Knowing how to look after yourself, and others, is especially important for coping and recovery.

Many schools and early learning services have been damaged or destroyed, and many more children, young people and their families have been – and will continue to be – affected by this crisis. Recovery will be different for each community, depending on the extent of the impact, and the needs of each community may change over time.

For those who can, returning to their early learning service or school can provide a sense of familiarity and safety. At the same time, educators may feel the weight of responsibility to support their learning communities. This may be especially difficult for educators who have been personally affected by the bushfires.

While Be You is not a clinical support service, this resource is a source of information about looking after yourself and others in the days, weeks and months after the bushfires.

New sources of information on supporting and protecting mental health during, and after, bushfires are being released regularly. We will continue to update the Be You resource pack as new information becomes available.

Who is the resource pack for?

This resource pack has been developed with educators in mind, and it also includes information suitable for parents, families, children, young people and community members.

It is for communities both directly and indirectly affected – including those from regions that have been severely affected, those who have had children and young people who were evacuated, those who will be looking after children who were relocated, those who are affected by smoke and reduction in air quality, and those who are observing the media coverage and wondering what they can do to help.

Children and young people can develop trauma-related mental health issues even when not directly exposed to the bushfires. These events may bring back past traumatic experiences.

There is a lot of information online about how to cope with the trauma and the mental health impact of an event such as the bushfires. This resource pack has been compiled to offer educators high-quality information that may be useful for providing support, responding to the needs of everyone in your learning community, and for practising self-care.

How do I use the resource pack?

We know that communities and individuals are experiencing different stages of the bushfire crisis at a given time. Therefore, the pack includes resources for different stages of response and recovery.

The resource pack is split into three sections:

- **Immediate:** Information about how to deal with and manage distress in the immediate days and weeks after the event.
- **Short-term:** Information that may be useful in the first few months after the fires, which focuses on recovery and prevention of serious adverse mental health impacts that often occur as a result of bushfires.
- **Long-term:** Information for how to manage the longer-term impacts of the bushfires, including when children and young people are experiencing post-traumatic mental health challenges (e.g. depression, post-traumatic

stress disorder other anxiety disorders), as well as information for how to prepare your learning community for the disaster anniversary and a future disaster.

Resources are listed only once but may also apply to a different section (for example, a resource listed as short-term may also be useful in the long term). So, browse the lists to choose and use the best resource for your needs, and the needs of your learning community.

This resource pack is not a clinical guide to providing mental health interventions to children, young people and their families. Instead it is a quick reference guide for those looking for information about what you can do to help support your learning community.

For more information about clinical services available to the community, visit the Department of Health's [bushfire information and support](#) page.

Looking after yourself when accessing these resources

We have taken care to include resources from reputable organisations. Please be mindful when accessing the links that they may contain information that could be distressing.

If you need immediate crisis support, you can call one of the numbers listed below.

Ongoing support

The Commonwealth Government has committed additional funding towards supporting mental health in early learning services and schools. The funding will allow Be You to deploy hands-on, evidence-based support to educators. Keep an eye on the [Be You bushfires response](#) page for more information.

Crisis support information

For immediate crisis support, the following services are available:

- **Emergency services:** 000
- **Lifeline:** 13 11 14
- **Kids Helpline:** 1800 55 1800
- **Beyond Blue Support Service:** 1300 22 4636

Immediate

The following resources provide information which may be useful in the immediate aftermath of the bushfires. It includes information about managing distress, looking after yourself, and talking to children and young people about the bushfires.

[Advice to assist parents, teachers and students following recent fires](#)

Author: New South Wales Department of Education

Who is it for: Primary and secondary school teachers

Brief overview: This website is published by the New South Wales Department of Education. The webpage features a video with advice on supporting children and young people through a bushfire crisis.

[Bushfire Social Story](#)

Author: Early Connections. A collaborative network of five not-for-profit community-based organisations on the Mid North Coast (NSW).

Who is it for: Children and young people

Brief overview: This downloadable Microsoft Word document or PDF is a social story for supporting educators and families to engage in a conversation about bushfires with children and young people with an Autism Spectrum Disorder.

[Community Trauma Toolkit](#)

Author: Emerging Minds, The National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health (Australian Government)

Who is it for: Early childhood educators, primary and secondary school teachers

Brief overview: The Emerging Minds Community Trauma Toolkit includes over 200 resources about trauma. We have selected the most relevant links to the bushfire crisis response to include within our resource list. The Community Trauma Toolkit is endorsed by the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC), and suitable for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences.

[How educators can help in the classroom following a traumatic event](#)

Author: Emerging Minds, The National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health (Australian Government)

Who is it for: Primary and secondary school teachers

Brief overview: This fact sheet from Emerging Minds includes advice on strategies and practices educators can implement to support children and young people in the classroom following a traumatic event.

[How educators can support children immediately after a disaster or community trauma](#)

Author: Emerging Minds, The National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health (Australian Government)

Who is it for: Early childhood educators, primary and secondary school teachers

Brief overview: This resource from Emerging Minds includes an outline of psychological first aid, advice on how to support infants and children following a traumatic event, as well as a list of suggested practical ways that educators can provide support.

[Information for parents and carers looking after children who have been affected by bushfires](#)

Author: Australian Psychological Society

Who is it for: Families, parents and caregivers

Brief overview: This two-page PDF (titled Helping children who have been affected by bushfires) provides a list of behaviours children who have experienced trauma may display, and advice for families on how to support recovery.

[Looking after yourself and your family](#)

Author: Australian Red Cross

Who is it for: Community members

Brief overview: This resource provides advice on taking care of yourself and providing support for others following distressing events. There are resources for parents, families and caregivers in Arabic, Farsi, Somali, Nepali and Swahili.

[Psychological First Aid: A guide to supporting people affected by disaster](#)

Author: Australian Red Cross

Who is it for: Community members

Brief overview: This psychological first aid guide is for people working in disaster preparedness, response and recovery. It provides an overview of best practice in psychological first aid following disasters and traumatic events.

[Talking to children about what is happening in Australia](#)

Author: The Royal Children's Hospital Melbourne

Who is it for: Families, parents and caregivers

Brief overview: This website includes a video that discusses the signs of trauma in children and young people, along with a list of the ways in which families can help their children.

[Traumatic events, the media and your child](#)

Author: Emerging Minds

Who is it for: Families, parents and caregivers

Brief overview: This two-page PDF focuses on the impact of media coverage during a disaster, and ways for families to help children consume, understand and process media. The advice given will lessen the impact of disaster-related media and help prevent poor mental health.

Short-term

The following resources provide information which may be useful in the first few months after the bushfires, when children and young people who may have been directly or indirectly affected by the bushfires have returned to schools and early learning services. This includes information about the signs and symptoms of trauma and post-traumatic stress, as well as information on how you can promote recovery and resilience in the classroom.

[A series of fact sheets on trauma response in children of different ages.](#)

- [0-24 months](#)
- [2-4 years](#)
- [5-12 years](#)
- [Adolescence](#)

Author: Emerging Minds and the Australian National University

Who is it for: Early childhood educators, primary and secondary school teachers

Brief overview: These four factual PDFs include information about common signs of trauma in children of different developmental stages. These behaviours may present immediately or in the short term following an event.

[Be You fact sheets: Grief, trauma and critical incidents](#)

Author: Be You

Who is it for: Early childhood educators, primary and secondary school teachers

Brief overview: This is a set of five fact sheets covering different topics including: Grief, Supporting children and young people affected by grief, Trauma, How trauma affects children and young people, and Supporting children and young people who have experienced trauma.

[Case examples of trauma reactions in young people](#)

Author: Australian National University

Who is it for: Early childhood educators, primary and secondary school teachers

Brief overview: This series of case studies helps educators understand and recognise what trauma might look like in children and young people. Learning communities could use these in professional learning sessions for educators or in communication from leadership discussing that trauma may present on different ways.

[How to ask are you ok?](#)

Author: RUOK?

Who is it for: Community members

Brief overview: This web page includes advice on how to start a conversation with someone you may be concerned about. It also includes a video with tips. This resource could be used by anyone who is concerned about someone they know and may be helpful to educators and leaders concerned about a colleague.

[Joel and the storm](#)

Author: Phoenix Australia. Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health

Who is it for: Children

Brief overview: This is an illustrated online story for children who have experienced trauma. The narrative follows a 9-year-old boy who has experienced a natural disaster and, as a result, is traumatised.

[Recovering from bushfires](#)

Author: Australian Psychological Society

Who is it for: Community members

Brief overview: A series of resources for the community about what you can do to help those affected by bushfires. Topics include helpful thinking, problem solving, the importance of social connections, taking time for pleasurable activities and managing emotional distress.

[Recovery: Helping yourself](#)

Author: Phoenix Australia. Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health

Who is it for: Community members

Brief overview: This webpage includes a comprehensive list of strategies that can be implemented to support your own recovery after a traumatic event. It includes a short video that explains how people may be impacted by traumatic events.

[Re-establishing routines and rules following a disaster or traumatic event](#)

Author: Emerging Minds. The National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health (Australian Government)

Who is it for: Families, parents and caregivers

Brief overview: This webpage includes a short video that outlines the importance of school and home routines for children and young people following a traumatic event. It includes advice on how to implement this to support recovery through stability.

[Resources for teachers: school recovery tool kit](#)

Author: Australian National University

Who is it for: Primary and secondary school teachers

Brief overview: This PDF from the Australian National University was created following the 2009 Victorian bushfires. Page 6 includes 10 tips for creating a trauma-sensitive classroom. It also includes a broad range of topics from educator self-care to behaviours common to children and young people who have experienced trauma.

[Supporting a young person after a natural disaster](#)

Author: headspace

Who is it for: Families, parents and caregivers

Brief overview: This webpage is a resource for families and friends supporting children and young people after a natural disaster.

[The impact of trauma on mental health](#)

Author: headspace

Who is it for: Young people

Brief overview: This webpage for young people explains that trauma impacts people differently. The page outlines different types of trauma, different responses to trauma and advice on help seeking.

[Trauma: first response to help children](#)

Author: Raising Children Network

Who is it for: Families, parents and caregivers

Brief overview: This website provides information for families on ways to identify signs of trauma, as well as guidelines for their response. This resource supports children and young people between the ages of 3 and 15.

[Trauma-informed services and trauma-specific care for Indigenous Australian children](#)

Author: Judy Atkinson, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

Who is it for: Community members

Brief overview: This resource sheet from 2013 examines the impact of trauma in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. It focuses on the delivery of trauma-informed and trauma-specific children's services and care.

Long-term

The following resources provide information about continued support and advice in the months after the bushfires – when the physical impact may no longer be as visible, but when communities are still recovering.

It also includes resources about preparedness for those who have not yet experienced a bushfire and those who want to ensure they are prepared for the future.

[Birdie's Tree](#)

Author: Queensland Centre for Perinatal and Infant Mental Health. Queensland Health.

Who is it for: Preschool and primary-school-age children

Brief overview: This series of resources, including books and online games, can be used to support children to work through their responses to scary situations. The resources include a storybook titled *Birdie and the fire*.

[Bushfire preparedness for your family](#)

Author: Trauma and Grief Network (Australian Government, ANU and ACATLG Network)

Who is it for: Families, parents and caregivers

Brief overview: This two-page PDF outlines ways for families to prepare for a bushfire. It includes tip for both practical and psychological preparedness.

[It's bushfire season and Playschool are talking about your emergency plans](#)

Author: Play School (ABC)

Who is it for: Children

Brief overview: This is a short video housed on Facebook that helps children to understand what steps they and their families might follow in preparing for a bushfire.

[Strathewen community: A bushfire recovery story 10 years in the making](#)

Author: Emerging Minds

Who is it for: Early childhood educators, primary and secondary school teachers

Brief overview: This 30-minute video follows the story of Strathewen Primary School and their recovery following the bushfire in their community in 2009. The video discusses themes that may be challenging, such as loss of life and the impacts of the bushfire on children in the community.

[Supporting children after natural and human-induced disasters](#)

Author: Australian Institute of Family Studies

Who is it for: Community members

Brief overview: This webinar, recorded in August 2019, looks at how practitioners can help children and families navigate the different stages of community trauma.
