



Bushfire response resource pack

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

Updated: 21 May 2020

What is the purpose of the resource pack?

The bushfire crisis in the summer of 2019–2020 had a profound impact on Australia. Many schools and early learning services were damaged or destroyed, and many more children, young people and their families have been – and will continue to be – affected by this crisis.

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.

Recovery will be different for each community, depending on the extent of the impact, and the needs of each community may change over time.

In addition to the support offered through the [Bushfire Response Program](#) Be You has developed a resource pack for schools and early learning services affected by the bushfires. The resource pack focuses on

providing information related to mental health and wellbeing for learning communities.

Who is the resource pack for?

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

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 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 divided 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 (for example depression, post-traumatic stress disorder or other anxiety disorders), as well as information on how to prepare your learning community for the disaster anniversary and a future disaster.

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 to the right.

Crisis support information

For immediate crisis support, the following services are available:

- **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.

[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.

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.

[Australian bushfires mental health resources](#)

Author: Phoenix Australia – Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health

Who is it for: Community members

Brief overview: This webpage contains a section on resources for community members, including a self-help recovery guide, tips for parents and teachers supporting children and young people, and a guide to help children heal after a crisis. The webpage also includes other Phoenix Australia resources on the impacts of trauma and strategies to support recovery.

[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.

[Emerging Minds educators resource pack: Supporting children after bushfires](#)

In the classroom:

- [How educators can help in the classroom](#)
- [Re-establishing routines and rules following a disaster or traumatic event](#) (video)

- [Trauma sensitive behaviour management](#)
- [Return to school support for educators](#) (video)

Psychological reactions to trauma by age and stage:

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

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 selection of resources helps educators support students after the bushfires. It contains evidence-based videos, tips about what to expect in an education setting, and information about common signs of trauma in children of different developmental stages.

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

Author: RUOK?

Who is it for: Community members

Brief overview: This webpage 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 after a bushfire](#)

Author: Lifeline Australia

Who is it for: Community members

Brief overview: This webpage provides toolkits to support communities, individuals and families to cope with the aftermath of bushfires and other natural disasters. Topics include helping children cope, addressing loss and change in the community after a bushfire, and a self-help resource for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people coping with grief and loss.

[Recovering together after a natural disaster – fire](#)

Author: Queensland Centre for Perinatal and Infant Mental Health

Who is it for: Families, parents and caregivers

Brief overview: This information sheet helps families identify when babies and young children are distressed by what is happening in the world around them. It offers tips, strategies and activities for supporting young children at these times, and includes a short story to read and talk about with babies and young children.

[Resources for teachers](#)

Author: Australian Red Cross

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

Brief overview: This webpage, with the focus on emergency preparedness and recovery, provides educators resources and lesson plans ranging from early childhood to Year 12.

[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.

[Australian bushfires 2020: Psychological preparation and recovery](#)

Author: Australian Psychological Society

Who is it for: Community members

Brief overview: This series of information sheets guides the community and families on a range of topics, from preparing for bushfires and psychological first aid to looking after children affected by bushfires and developing useful skills for recovery.

[Autism and bushfire emergencies](#)

Author: Autism Tasmania

Who is it for: Families, parents and caregivers

Brief overview: This webpage offers tips and suggestions for families to help children and young people on the autism spectrum adjust to changes and stresses during bushfire season. It also includes social stories to help with understanding the fires.

[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.

[Preparing for emergencies](#)

Author: Australian Red Cross

Who is it for: Community members

Brief overview: This webpage offers tips and resources to prepare families for emergencies, including how to create an emergency plan, a Get Prepared disaster preparedness app, and links to helpful resources for before, during and after an emergency.

[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.

[Understanding and managing anniversary reactions: Tips for families affected by natural disasters](#)

Author: Trauma and Grief Network

Who is it for: Families, parents and caregivers

Brief overview: This tip sheet supports families in the lead up to the anniversary of a natural disaster event, and includes information about understanding how children and young people may respond during the anniversary period, and prompts for conversations about the anniversary.