

Supporting recovery for children and young people

For early childhood professionals,
school staff and Student Support
Services Officers

The 2009 Victorian bushfires have had an impact on many people across Victoria, both directly and indirectly. Children and young people are particularly vulnerable and can respond to traumatic events such as bushfires in a variety of different ways. Staff play a vital role in providing support, advice and guidance to children and young people throughout the healing process following a traumatic event.

This brochure provides information about specialised support for children and young people outside the kindergarten or school setting. A shortened version of this brochure is also available online at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/bushfires/support/schools.htm>.

The brochure has been developed by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), in consultation with the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, General Practice Victoria, Department of Human Services, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Australian Psychological Society and the Australian Association of Social Workers.

Working in partnership: kindergartens, schools and families

Children and young people spend a great deal of their lives at kindergarten or school, where they feel safe and comfortable, and are likely to ask for help. To ensure that children and young people are adequately supported and continue to stay engaged with their learning and education, it is important to work in partnership with parents/carers and maintain supportive, open and respectful communication about a child or young person's health, wellbeing and educational progress.

If you are concerned about the behaviour of a child or young person, it is a good idea to discuss these concerns with their parents/carers in a safe, supportive environment at the kindergarten or school. Many parents/carers have also experienced grief and loss and any discussions need to consider the circumstances of a family. Staff members who have also experienced grief and loss as a result of the bushfires may find it difficult to speak about some issues facing children and young people. Kindergarten and school leaders should ensure that their staff can access support from a Student Support Services Officer or an external support service when working with parents/carers about issues concerning children or young people.

Kindergarten and school-based support for children and young people

There are many support services available in kindergartens and schools. Early childhood professionals, school staff, Student Welfare Coordinators, Student Support Services Officers, Primary Welfare Officers, school nurses and chaplains can provide support, advice and information to parents/carers, children and young people who are having problems.

Student Support Services Officers in schools

Student Support Services Officers play a vital role by providing specialist support and assistance to schools. Student Support Services Officers work closely with parents/carers, children and young people and community-based health and support services to ensure that students have access to appropriate levels of support at the right time. This support may include assessing the needs of a child or young person, making a referral to specialist service support, advocating for the child or young person or their family, or providing advice to staff about how best to manage and support a child or young person. Some children and young people may require an additional level of support from mental health professionals, which is accessed outside the kindergarten or school setting.



Every
child,
every
opportunity



Community-based services

There are a range of specialised support services available in bushfire-affected communities, including community health centres, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, drug and alcohol support services and private allied health professionals. There are also a number of telephone support services available to provide support, counselling, information and referrals, including:

- **Kids Helpline** 1800 551 800
- **Lifeline** 13 11 14
- **Maternal and Child Health Line** 13 22 29
- **Mensline** 1300 789 978
- **Parentline** 13 22 89
- **Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement** 1300 664 786
- **Relationships Australia** 1300 364 277
- **Directline** (drug and alcohol support) 1800 888 236
- **YSAS - Youth Substance Abuse Service** (drug and alcohol support for young people aged between 12 and 21) 1800 014 446

DEECD has developed information brochures about the specific support services available in each of the fire-affected local government areas. These brochures are online at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/bushfires/support/parents.htm>.

Community Health Centres

Community Health Centres provide a wide range of health and community support services which vary from centre to centre, including medical, dental, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, nursing, podiatry, community development and liaison, education programs, drug and alcohol support, counselling and casework.

To find a Community Health Centre in your local government area, including a Community Health Centre which offers counselling or social support services, visit http://www.health.vic.gov.au/communityhealth/service_provider/community_health_directory.htm.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) operate around Victoria to provide targeted intervention and support to children and young people under 18 years of age with serious mental health issues. This includes children or young people with diagnosable mental health issues which are problematic to growth or development, and/or where there are substantial difficulties in the child or young person's social or family environment.

If you believe a child or young person may benefit from a referral to a CAMHS service, speak to their parents/carers about your concerns and provide information about the support services available. In some cases, it may be helpful to assist parents/carers with the CAMHS referral process.

Additional information about CAMHS can be found online at <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth/services/child/index.htm>.

Drug and alcohol support services

There are many drug and alcohol support services around Victoria that provide a wide variety of services, including outpatient services, drug and alcohol counselling, referrals, withdrawal programs, education programs, self-help or drug users group and assessment. To access a drug and alcohol support service in your local government area, speak to your GP, local Community Health Centre or your Bushfire Case Manager. Alternatively, you can search for a service online at <http://www.vicdrugguide.org.au/> or <http://www.aodservices.net.au/>.

Allied health professionals

Allied health professionals are social workers, psychologists, mental health nurses, occupational therapists, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers with specific mental health qualifications. These professionals can provide specialised support for children and young people outside a kindergarten or school setting.

Who may benefit from some specialised support?

Each child or young person will have a unique response to a traumatic event, or to grief and loss issues. Sometimes they struggle to cope with or make sense of these experiences and need an additional level of support. There are differences in the length of time it takes individuals to begin the process of recovery, and there is no one way that children and young people will respond and work through feelings of sadness, anger, grief or loss. Reactions may take some time to appear and can continue for extended periods. However, there are some behaviours that children and young people may exhibit that need to be addressed and these should be discussed with parents/carers to ensure that adequate support is provided.

These concerning behaviours include:

- Feeling anxious, fearful or distressed
- Experiencing physical discomfort, including problems eating, sleeping or toileting
- Demonstrating behaviour problems such as aggression or anger that disrupt a child or young person's development or adjustment at home or at school
- Having difficulty concentrating or behaving impulsively

- Having nightmares or bed-wetting
- Having difficulty with relationships within the family and/or with their friends
- Refusing to attend kindergarten or school.

Children and young people who have experienced trauma such as the death of someone close to them, loss of their home and/or belongings or who were in close proximity to the bushfires are at higher risk of exhibiting concerning behaviours and should be closely monitored and supported. In these situations, staff can provide parents/carers with information about any specialised support their child may need.

An information brochure has been developed to provide parents/carers with information on accessing specialised support. This brochure can be found online at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/bushfires/support/parents.htm>.

Support from allied health professionals

Working in partnership: kindergartens, schools, families and allied health professionals

Children and young people will receive the best support and treatment if staff, parents/carers and allied health professionals work in partnership and keep the lines of communication open regarding a child or young person's needs. Staff should be aware that any communication with parents/carers, medical practitioners or allied health professionals needs to be in line with the *Information Privacy Act 2000* and the *Health Records Act 2001*. The *Information Privacy Act 2000* can be accessed at http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/consol_act/ipa2000231/ and the *Health Records Act 2001* can be accessed at http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/vic/consol_act/hra2001144/.

Referrals to allied health professionals

In order to access specialised support from an allied health professional, parents/carers need to get a referral from their GP or Bushfire Case Manager. If you believe a child or young person would benefit from an additional level of support from an allied health professional you should discuss this with their parents/carers.

Better Outcomes in Mental Health program

The Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS) component of the Better Outcomes in Mental Health Care program enables those individuals that have been diagnosed with a mental illness or who are experiencing persisting psychological symptoms as a result of the bushfires to access specialised mental health services provided by an allied health professional.

Kindergartens and schools in bushfire-affected areas can access advice from ATAPS allied health professionals about how to assist children, young people and staff to cope with trauma, grief and loss. These health professionals can also assist staff in determining whether a child or young person may need specialised support from an allied health professional outside the school or kindergarten setting.

For further information, please contact your local Division of General Practice:

- **North East Valley Division of General Practice:** 9496 4333
- **Eastern Ranges General Practice Association:** 9739 6751
- **Central Highlands General Practice Network:** 5428 4848
- **Northern Division of General Practice:** 8480 4617
- **North East Victorian Division of General Practice:** 5754 1226
- **Central Victoria General Practice Network:** 5441 7806
- **West Victoria Division of General Practice:** 5352 4804 or 5381 1756
- **Central West Gippsland Division of General Practice:** 5126 2899
- **GP Alliance – South Gippsland:** 5674 3105

Bushfire Psychological Counselling program

The Bushfire Psychological Counselling Voucher program will provide people affected by the bushfires with up to six counselling sessions at any time over the next two years through a specially designed voucher system. Individual, couple or family counselling may be accessed through this program. You do not need to seek a referral from your GP or Bushfire Case Manager to access counselling vouchers. For additional information on this program see

<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/bushfireappeal/Fund-Payments/support-payments/psychological-support-package> .