

Supporting recovery for children and young people

For Early Childhood Professionals,
School Staff and Student Support
Services Officers

Every
child,
every
opportunity



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. An extended version of this brochure is online at www.education.vic.gov.au/about/bushfires/support/schools.htm.

Working in partnership: kindergartens, schools and families

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. This helps to ensure that children and young people are adequately supported and continue to stay engaged with their learning and education after a traumatic event.

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 a variety of support services available in kindergartens and schools. These include early childhood professionals, school staff, Student Welfare Coordinators, Student Support Services Officers, Primary Welfare Officers, school nurses and chaplains. Each provide support, advice and information to parents/carers, children and young people who are having problems.

Student Support Services Officers (SSSO) in schools

Student Support Services Officers play a vital role by providing specialist support and assistance to schools by helping strengthen the capacity of schools to keep students engaged with their education and by providing specialist support and assistance. SSSOs work closely with school staff, parents/carers, students and community based health and support services to ensure students have access to appropriate levels of support at the right time.

Who may benefit from specialised help from an allied health professional?

Each child or young person will have a unique response to a traumatic event, or to grief and loss issues. 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. 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.

What services are available in local communities?

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

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 www.education.vic.gov.au/about/bushfires/support/parents.htm

Accessing support from an allied health professional

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.

Bushfire Psychological Counselling Voucher 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. For additional information on this program see www.dhs.vic.gov.au/bushfireappeal/Fund-Payments/support-payments/psychological-support-package

