

AUSTRALIAN BUSHFIRES

Helping your child cope with anxiety



Helping your child cope with anxiety as the bushfire season approaches

If your child or teenager has experienced a bushfire firsthand, it may have caused them to feel that the world is no longer safe and predictable. As a new fire season approaches, they may begin to feel apprehensive, anxious and distressed, remembering the horrors of the past, and fearful of what will happen if fire threatens again. The COVID-19 pandemic has brought additional challenges that affect individuals and families differently, especially depending on where they live.

Young people might not always have the words to describe how they are feeling, and they may show their anxiety in different ways - they may be fearful, sad, become clingy, have difficulty concentrating, or have sleep problems and/or other behavioural problems. While you may find this frustrating, try not to express anger, or blame the child for this behaviour. Instead, try the following strategies to help them deal with their anxiety.

Maintain routines

- Maintain your child's, and family's, daily routines as much as possible. Continuing to go to school, see friends, and do usual hobbies, activities and chores is a helpful way for children to maintain a sense of 'normality' and safety.
- Enjoy activities together as a family.
- Ensure your child is eating well and getting plenty of sleep and exercise.
- Encourage them to practice daily relaxation techniques such as meditation or calm breathing.

Help your child or teenager to feel safe

- Reassure your child that he or she is safe and cared for.
- Limit and/or monitor your child's exposure to television or other sources of information about the weather, or discussions about the coming bushfire season. If they are reporting things they have heard or read, discuss it with them so that you have a chance to correct any misinformation and/or provide a balanced view.





Help your child or teenager to feel safe (continued)

- If your child wants to, talk with them about their concerns, and reassure them that they will be looked after.
- Don't be afraid to tell your child if you can't answer all of their questions.
- Encourage your child to express how they are feeling. This could be through talking, but it might also be through play, drawing, writing or music, or other forms of artistic expression.
- Get your child involved in community preparedness activities.
- Involve your child in creating or updating the family's bushfire plan.

If your child or teenager continues to experience distress, talk to your GP.

If anxiety, depression, sleep difficulties or irritability persist for more than two weeks after your return home, you should talk to your GP. For immediate assistance and/or 24-hour counselling and referrals, see details on the right.

Useful services and resources

Lifeline - for immediate assistance
13 11 14

Australian Psychological Society - find a psychologist
1800 333 497

Beyond Blue
1300 224 636