

Information for school staff

The bushfires in Australia have had a significant impact on our country. Many schools and their local communities have been directly affected, but we know there are also many children and young people who have been indirectly exposed to this crisis. You may have students in your school whose parents were fighting the fires, holidaying in a bushfire affected area, or have friends and family affected by the bushfires. Many of us and our students will have been adversely affected by the media coverage around the bushfires, including confronting images of injured wildlife.

Following disasters, people can experience a wide range of physical, emotional, cognitive and behavioural stress responses. These stress responses might make it harder for some students to process information, remember things, concentrate and manage their feelings. For the majority of children, these responses subside over time, usually in the early days and weeks. Most will recover well using their own resources or with the help from friends, family and other significant adults, such as teachers.

Teachers play an important role in identifying wellbeing concerns of their students. The primary role of teachers in all of our schools is to continue being a good and supportive teacher. Students need to feel safe and return to normal school routines as soon as possible. This will provide a level of certainty knowing where they need to be and what they need to do throughout each day. Please keep in mind that there is expertise and other resources within your own school and more broadly within the Department, to help you provide the support your students may need.

Ways school staff can support students

- listen/look – listen to the student’s story and look for changes in their behaviour and check in regularly with any students that you are worried about
- be sure to make time to connect with the students you taught last year as well as new students. This can be done informally in breaks or before and after school. As a teacher your relationship with students is central to them feeling known, valued and cared for
- monitor students who have been recently relocated to a new school and explore ways to link students together if they have been relocated
- remind and reassure students that school is a safe place to be and return to classroom/school routines and activities as soon as possible
- encourage students to reach out to friends for support as well as adults
- answer questions in a simple honest way, using language that is age-appropriate

- highlight your student's and communities' strengths and resilience, be hopeful and optimistic for the future, and
- if you are concerned about a particular student you should consult with the school counselling and support staff.

Talking about the bushfires

Some students will want to talk about their experience or what they have seen in the media and some will be hoping that their return to school will give them a break from talking about it. Both of these responses are normal.

There is a common misconception that talking about the traumatic event can cause more problems or lead to distress. It is important to consider how you talk to the student who has experienced trauma but talking about the traumatic event and the student's feelings does not generally lead them to develop problems. A few tips to remember:

- to place some limitation of time around discussions relating to the recent disaster
- Some younger students who find it difficult to talk about the events might respond better to drawing or playing games as a way of communicating
- For older students, talking can include more complex issues and how they have affected the family,
- consider students' individual circumstances and plan for emotional reactions.

Support for school staff

School staff may also require support, particularly if they, their family or friends have been directly affected by the bushfires. It is important to take the time to identify colleagues who have been affected and discuss the types of support available to them.

Support options for staff

- [Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\) \(staff only\)](#) - contact 1800 060 650
- external support services, including
 - local GP
 - Beyond Blue - contact 1300 22 4636
 - Lifeline - contact 13 11 14
 - or other local community services.

Additional resources

Be You resource pack - <https://beyou.edu.au/bushfires-response>