



maintaining a healthy headspace during the bushfire season - supporting your young person

Supporting your young person

The timing and duration of bushfire danger seasons vary across different regions in Australia. While the threat of bushfires can directly affect people living in high-risk areas, it's also normal to have reactions if you live further away and are indirectly affected (e.g., by media exposure or hearing from others).

Taking positive action and anticipating your own and your young person's emotional reactions during the bushfire season can be helpful for your wellbeing during and after this time.

Looking after yourself

Although you might feel like looking after yourself is not a priority, it is important to practise self-care. It can improve your ability to care for your young person going through a tough time. Talking to a trusted other, such as a family member, friend, Elder, or counsellor about any concerns and feelings you are having can be helpful.



Modelling self-care and help-seeking behaviours can be particularly important during the bushfire season, because your young person might look to you and be encouraged to also practise self-care.



Tips to support your young person's healthy headspace during the bushfire season

The following principles of Psychological First Aid (PFA) can help to guide you in supporting your young person at all times during the bushfire season:



Listen and look

- listen to questions and concerns
- be patient and understanding
- look at your young person's behaviour.



Protect

- focus on the steps needed to maintain your and your person's physical and emotional safety, or to return to safety as soon as possible
- resources such as the Red Cross RediPlan can help you stay focused and prioritise actions
- keep your young person informed of next steps.



Connect

- support your young person to feel connected to information, familiar people and places
- if you get separated during an emergency, reunite as soon as possible.

Tips to support your young person

Listen to your young person

During bushfire response and recovery, young people's experiences can be overlooked. Listening to young people is important because it helps them feel understood and can make them feel more in control. It can also help them to process their thoughts and feelings. Providing young people with reassurance and emotional support can help them feel more secure. Remember that you don't have to have all the answers. If you're unsure about how to answer a question, work with your young person to find out together.

Get informed

To prepare for an emergency, discuss ways of how you and your young person could work together. This may help your young person feel proactive and more in control. This could include the steps to take in an emergency (e.g., what to take with them when evacuation is required; where to meet in case you get separated).

It's important to keep informed about bushfire developments. This includes monitoring official warnings. It's also important to calmly communicate accurate information with your young person. At the same time, be aware that constant exposure to bushfire-focused news can increase negative feelings. You and your young person may want to discuss ways to help them and your household access media safely (e.g., set limits for media use, manage automatic app alerts, or unfollow content or pages).

Connect with others

Keeping in contact with friends, family, and neighbours, especially during days with high risks for bushfires can help people feel more grounded. It can also help you and your young person draw on your strengths by getting connected with people who are reassuring and comforting.

Talk about your young person's role in supporting others

You may also notice young people feel responsible for caring for other family members or friends. For instance, those young people who have younger siblings might feel responsible for the wellbeing of their siblings. Remember to regularly check in with all of your young people about their worries. Make sure to talk to your young people about whether they feel supported enough.

Practise calming techniques

In times of heightened stress, practising calming techniques can help with feeling grounded (e.g., taking slow and gentle breaths). You might want to encourage your young person to access apps or websites that help with feeling calm and maybe even practise the calming exercises together. Note that the use of alcohol and other drugs can be counterproductive.

Get into a routine as soon as you can

When the danger has subsided, returning to old routines or establishing new routines is helpful. For your young person, this can include going back to school, uni, TAFE, or their job, engaging in hobbies, and seeing friends. Encourage them to be involved in the activities that give them a sense of purpose.

Getting support

It's normal for you or your young person to experience a variety of reactions to the bushfire season. This doesn't mean either of you will have ongoing problems. If you or your young person are noticing a significant impact on your emotions, your daily activities or you're not finding any improvement, it's important to get professional help.



Make sure to talk to your young people about whether they feel supported enough.



If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)

If you need immediate assistance call 000 or to speak to someone urgently, please call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467.

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