



Australian Bushfires:

Student wellbeing and support for teachers

The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR) and the Emerging Minds: National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health are working to support teachers on the return to school in the context of the national bushfire crisis. Teachers, students and their families may all be experiencing distress as a result of bushfire activity in their local communities or places they have visited, as well as through exposure to ongoing media coverage.



Teaching in bushfire-affected communities

Most adults and children will cope and recover well from a disaster with the right help. Teachers, continuing to perform their essential role in student learning and wellbeing, are invaluable supporters of children and young people in recovery. Teachers in bushfire-affected communities are advised to:

- Focus on establishing and maintaining normal classroom routines
- Develop new and existing relationships to support connection between both students and staff
- Provide structured opportunities to talk about the bushfires*
- Provide students with additional notice and reminders of changes to scheduled events
- Provide spaces and opportunities to focus on emotional expression and regulation skills through mindfulness, circle time or relaxation activities
- Anticipate situations which may trigger distress, such as hot and windy weather, fog or smoke
- Monitor students for symptoms of trauma over time
- Practice self-care and seek support for themselves and their students.

**For younger children, talking about the event may be difficult. Some children might respond better to drawing or playing games as a way of communicating.*

Talking about bushfires:

- Place rules and time limits around 'bushfire talk'
- Remain calm and optimistic, and convey a clear message that the threat/danger is over
- Focus on positive coping strategies the student has demonstrated since the traumatic event.

Media coverage of bushfires

Students who have witnessed the impact of the bushfire crisis on communities, animals and the environment personally or through widespread media coverage are likely to feel distressed. It is important to acknowledge students' concerns about the bushfire crisis and talk about it. If you don't know the answer to their questions, use it as an opportunity to explore the answers together. Offer reassurance, avoid distressing media content and explore examples of all the people trying to help and ways that students can make a difference too.



Further information and advice

AIDR Education for Young People Program: www.schools.aidr.org.au

- Contact brigid.little@aidr.org.au to join our extensive education network (DRANZSEN) supporting young people to learn about natural hazards and participate in protective action before, during and after an emergency or disaster.
- Explore resources, initiatives and stories from young people and schools in readiness, recovery and resilience to natural hazards through the education program newsletter.

Emerging Minds: www.emergingminds.com.au/resources/toolkits

- Community Trauma Toolkit: explore evidence-based resources for educators and carers from the National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health to support children and adults before, during and after a disaster or other traumatic event.
- Seek expert advice on trauma, mental health and wellbeing in infants, children and adolescents.

Additional support is available from your local education authority:

New South Wales

<https://education.nsw.gov.au/public-schools/school-safety/advice-to-assist-parents-teachers-and-students-following-recent-fires>

Victoria

<https://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/programs/Pages/bushfires.aspx>

Tasmania

<https://www.education.tas.gov.au/parents-carers/bushfire-support/>

South Australia

<https://www.education.sa.gov.au/sites-and-facilities/bushfires-and-emergency-closures/advice-help-parents-teachers-and-students-after-bushfire>

Western Australia

www.education.wa.edu.au

Northern Territory

www.education.nt.gov.au

Queensland

<https://education.qld.gov.au/initiatives-and-strategies/strategies-and-programs/natural-disaster-resources>

Australian Capital Territory

www.education.act.gov.au

The National Workforce Centre for Child Mental Health (NWC) is funded by the Australian Government Department of Health under the National Support for Child and Youth Mental Health Program.

The NWC is led by Emerging Minds and delivered in partnership with the Australian Institute of Family Studies (AIFS), the Parenting Research Centre (PRC), the Australian National University (ANU) and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP).