

Preparing for the anniversary of the Victorian Bushfires (2009)

Information for early childhood settings

Anniversaries and memorials

Anniversaries are times of remembering and reflecting. As the anniversary of the Victorian Bushfires (2009) approaches it is likely there will be increased discussion in early childhood settings and the wider community. Discussion about the anniversary will be welcomed by some and unwanted by others. Some children and staff may find this a very emotional time and may need the early childhood setting to be a 'safe haven' where they continue with their usual routine. It is important to think carefully about anniversary activities that might be beneficial and to also be mindful of the possible impacts of reflection and re-exposure for children and staff as a result of these activities.

Supporting staff

It is important that staff continue to look after their own physical and mental health and wellbeing using individual self care strategies. Directors/Coordinators should consult with staff to find out how they feel about possible anniversary or memorial activities, and should respect and support individual staff decisions about being involved in any planned activities.

Child Wellbeing

Positive anniversary or memorials activities can help children to feel more comfortable participating and expressing their feelings. Staff should be alert to any reactions that suggest the activity is causing anxiety. While participation in any anniversary or memorial activity should be voluntary, unexplained absences should immediately be followed up. It is important to provide meaningful alternative activities for those children who do not want to participate.

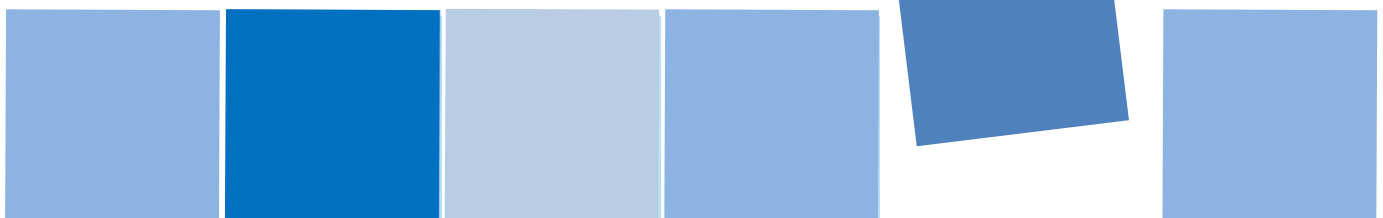
Media

As the anniversary approaches, increased media coverage can be expected, which may reactivate feelings of fear, anxiety, loss and distress in children of all ages. Images may be strong reminders of the challenges of the time since the bushfires. It is very important that parents/carers and other adults monitor children's exposure and reactions to media.

Supporting children

Around the anniversary, early childhood settings can provide ongoing support for children by:

- Acknowledging losses, fears and other emotions.
- Providing reassurance.
- Celebrating strengths of the individual child and of the early childhood setting.
- Reminding children about their coping strategies and doing some basic relaxation activities.
- Keeping an optimistic view of the future (which can help to normalise children's reactions).
- Utilising welfare staff to support and assist children who are overwhelmed by their feelings.



Additional information

This information has been adapted from the Australia Child and Adolescent Trauma, Loss and Grief Network.

http://www.earlytraumagrieff.anu.edu.au/resource_hubs/early_childhood_schools_hub/victorian_bushfires/

Further information about supporting children through trauma, grief and loss can be found on the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development's website at

<http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/bushfires/support/default.htm>