

# Preparing for the anniversary of the Victorian Bushfires (2009)

Information for parents and carers

## Anniversaries and memorials

Anniversaries are times of remembering and reflecting. As the anniversary of the Victorian Bushfires (2009) approaches there is likely to be increased discussion at early childhood settings, schools and in the wider community. Many children and young people may find this helpful, but it is important that this process is monitored, supervised and managed by adults. Children are vulnerable if they are over-exposed to discussions and images that are not age-appropriate.

Children and young people may react to the anniversary of the bushfires in a variety of ways. They may seek out relationships and environments where there is familiarity, predictability and people who are 'tuned in' to their needs. Around the time of the anniversary some parents/carers may notice behaviour changes such as:

- Younger children may express concerns about their safety and that of others
- School age children and young people may express new fears
- Young people may engage in risk taking activities and/or act out.

It is important that you discuss any concerning changes in behaviour with a GP or mental health professional.

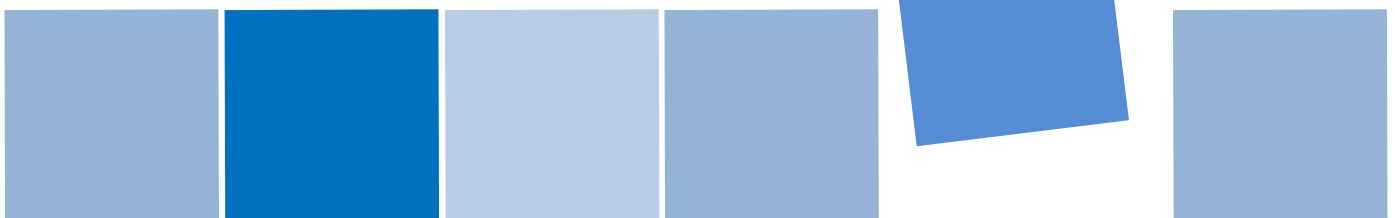
## Media

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. Very young children might not realise that this is coverage of past events, and they may fear for their safety again. Limit the amount of media coverage (particularly news media) that children are exposed to. Try and sit with your child if they are watching media coverage related to the anniversary and be available to talk about any feelings that they may experience.

### What you can do to help

Continue to:

- Maintain normal routines.
- Maintain open and honest communication.
- Let your child know that you are available to talk and listen to them.
- Monitor your child's reactions or responses over the anniversary period.
- Reassure your child that there are lots of people who work to make them as safe as possible.
- Talk about your family's preparation for this fire season. Working with your child on a family emergency action plan will help them play an active part in feeling safe.



## Marking the anniversary

Let children mark the anniversary in their own way. Some may participate in acknowledging the anniversary and others will ignore it and continue with their normal routines. It is important to make sure that any anniversary activities your child participates in are relevant to their developmental stage.

It is important that children don't feel pressured to participate in memorials, and it is helpful to be supportive of the choice your child makes. Ask your child if they would like to do something for the anniversary and if so, what they would like to do.

## School/early childhood community connectedness

Your child's early childhood setting or school may plan to mark the anniversary. Find out if anything is planned and discuss with your child whether they want to participate. The anniversary can be an opportunity to strengthen school/early childhood community connectedness.

## Seeking support

Anniversaries can trigger strong emotions for some people. It is important that you continue to look after your own physical and emotional needs, and seek additional support if needed. If you think your child may need additional support during the anniversary period you should talk to your child's teacher/early childhood coordinator, school welfare staff or your GP.

## Additional information

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

[http://www.earlytraumagrieff.anu.edu.au/resource\\_hubs/early\\_childhood\\_schools\\_hub/victorian\\_bushfires/](http://www.earlytraumagrieff.anu.edu.au/resource_hubs/early_childhood_schools_hub/victorian_bushfires/)

Further information about supporting children after a traumatic event 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>