

# Supporting recovery for children and young people

For parents and carers

The 2009 Victorian bushfires have had an impact on many people across Victoria, both directly and indirectly. Children and young people are particularly vulnerable and can respond to traumatic events such as the bushfires in a variety of different ways. This brochure provides information about accessing specialised support for your child outside of the kindergarten or school setting.

This brochure has been developed by the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in consultation with the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing, General Practice Victoria, the Department of Human Services, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, Australian Psychological Society and the Australian Association of Social Workers. A shortened version of this brochure is also available online at <http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/bushfires/support/parents.htm>.

## Kindergarten and school based support for children and young people

There are a variety of support services within the schools and kindergartens. Early childhood professionals, Maternal and Child Health Nurses, teachers, Student Welfare Coordinators, Student Support Services Officers, Primary Welfare Officers, school nurses and chaplains can provide support, advice and information about children and young people who are experiencing difficulties or having problems.

Student Support Services Officers (psychologists, social workers, speech therapists and occupational therapists) play an important role in supporting children and young people and provide specialist support and assistance to schools. If needed, Student Support Services Officers can work closely with you, your child and community based health and support services to ensure that your child has access to appropriate levels of support at the right time. Some children and young people may require an additional level of support from mental health professionals that can be accessed outside the kindergarten or school setting.

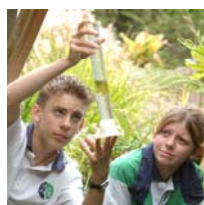
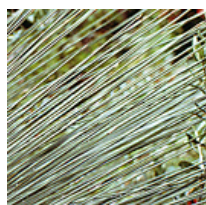
## Working in partnership: kindergartens, schools and families

It is important to work with your child's kindergarten or school and maintain open communication in relation to your child's health, wellbeing and educational progress. This will help to ensure that your child continues to stay engaged with their learning and education after a traumatic event. If you are concerned that your child is experiencing problems or having difficulties, it is a good idea to arrange a meeting with the kindergarten or school to discuss your concerns.

## Who may benefit from some specialised support?

Each child or young person will have a unique response to a traumatic event. There are differences in the length of time it takes individuals to begin the process of recovery and there is no 'one way' that children and young people will respond and work through feelings such as sadness, anger, grief or loss. However, there are some behaviours that children and young people may exhibit that are concerning and should be discussed with your GP, your Maternal and Child Health Nurse, your Bushfire Case Manager or your child's kindergarten or school welfare staff. These include:

- Feeling anxious, fearful or distressed
- Experiencing physical discomfort, including problems eating, sleeping or toileting
- Having difficulty concentrating or behaving impulsively
- Nightmares or bed-wetting
- Behaviour problems (such as aggression or anger) that disrupt your child's development or adjustment at home or at school
- Having difficulty with relationships within the family and/or with their friends



Every  
child,  
every  
opportunity



- Refusing to attend kindergarten or school
- Anxiety about safety or separation from you

## What services are available in my local community?

There are a range of specialised support services available in bushfire affected communities, including community health centres, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services, drug and alcohol support services and allied health professionals.

There are also a number of telephone support services available to provide support, counselling, information and referrals, including:

- **Parentline** 13 22 89
- **Kids Helpline** 1800 551 800
- **Maternal and Child Health Line** 13 22 29
- **Lifeline** 13 11 14
- **Mensline** 1300 789 978
- **Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement** 1300 664 786
- **Relationships Australia** 1300 364 277
- **Directline** (drug and alcohol support) 1800 888 236
- **YSAS - Youth Substance Abuse Service** (drug and alcohol support for young people aged between 12 and 21) 1800 014 446

DEECD has developed information brochures about the range of specific support services available in each of the fire affected local government areas. This brochure can be found online at [www.education.vic.gov.au/about/bushfires/parents.htm](http://www.education.vic.gov.au/about/bushfires/parents.htm).

## Community Health Centres

Community Health Centres provide a wide range of health and community support services which vary from centre to centre, including medical, dental, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, nursing, podiatry, community development and liaison, education programs, drug and alcohol support, counselling and casework.

To find a Community Health Centre in your local government area, including a Community Health Centre that offers counselling or social support services, visit

[http://www.health.vic.gov.au/communityhealth/service\\_provider/community\\_health\\_directory.htm](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/communityhealth/service_provider/community_health_directory.htm).

## Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services operate around Victoria to provide targeted intervention and support to children and young people under 18 years of age with serious mental health issues. This includes children or young people with diagnosable mental health issues which are problematic to growth or development and/or where there are substantial difficulties in the child or young person's social or family environment.

If you feel that your child might benefit from a referral to a CAMHS service speak to your GP, your Maternal and Child Health Nurse, your child's kindergarten or school welfare staff or the Student Support Services Officer who works with your child's kindergarten or school.

Additional information about CAMHS can be found online at <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth/services/child/index.htm>.

## Drug and alcohol support services

There are a range of drug and alcohol support services around Victoria that provide a wide variety of services including outpatient services, drug and alcohol counselling, referrals, withdrawal programs, education programs, self help or drug users group and assessment. To access a drug and alcohol support services in your local government area, you can speak to your GP, local Community Health Centre or your Bushfire Case Manager. Alternatively, you can search for a service online at <http://www.vicdrugguide.org.au/> or <http://www.aodservices.net.au/>.

## Allied health professionals

Allied health professionals are social workers, psychologists, mental health nurses, occupational therapists and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers with specific mental health qualifications. These professionals can provide specialised support for your child outside of the kindergarten or school setting which may include behavioural therapy, specialist counselling, play or art therapy.

## Accessing support from allied health professionals

In order to access specialised support for your child from an allied health professional, you need to get a referral from your GP or Bushfire Case Manager. Make an appointment to discuss your child's needs with your GP or Bushfire Case Manager, who will work with you and your child (if appropriate) to develop a Mental Health Care Plan for your child. Bushfire Case Managers can provide referrals to allied health professionals, however they cannot develop a Mental Health Care Plans, as this must be done by a GP. If your child is referred to an allied health professional by your Bushfire Case Manager you will

also need to make an appointment with your child's GP to develop a Mental Health Care Plan, but this does not need to happen before your child can be seen.

It is important to let your GP or Bushfire Case Manager know if your child is already receiving support from an allied health professional. Wherever possible, GPs and Bushfire Case Managers will try to ensure that your child continues to work with the same professional if that is your wish. Depending on your child's needs, you may like to ask your GP or Bushfire Case Manager for a referral to an allied health professional who has experience in working with children.

There will be no cost for referrals to allied health professionals for people affected by the bushfires under the Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS) component of the Better Outcomes in Mental Health program.

In some cases, it may be more appropriate for you be referred to an allied health professional registered under the Better Access in Mental Health program. These allied health professionals may also provide free services for people affected by the bushfires, however some services may charge a small co-payment. You will need to check with your GP or Bushfire Case Manager to determine what co-payment (if any) will be charged.

## Bushfire Psychological Counselling program

The Bushfire Psychological Counselling Voucher program will provide people affected by the bushfires with up to six counselling sessions at any time over the next two years through a specially designed voucher system. Individual, couple or family counselling may be accessed through this program. You do not need to seek a referral from your GP or Bushfire Case Manager to access counselling vouchers. For additional information on this program see

<http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/bushfireappeal/Fund-Payments/support-payments/psychological-support-package>.