Information for psychologists and social workers

Suggestions when working with children and adolescents that have been affected by the bushfires

**Arriving at the designated site**
- Maintain a calm presence
- Remain sensitive to cultural and religious needs
- Be mindful of ‘at risk’ individuals/community groups
- Be prepared to attend to basic needs first and foremost – food, shelter, warmth, comfort

**How to assist individuals**
- Offer practical assistance first (this is often the best way to make contact)
- Minimise the trauma reminders where possible (e.g. extremely distressed individuals, media coverage)
- Ensure contact is not intrusive
- Speak in a sensitive and calm way
- Use simple language
- Listen to what the person is saying and respond to let them know you have listened, let them take the lead
- Validate their feelings and emotions (help them understand that what they are experiencing are normal reactions to a distressing situation)
- Acknowledge the positive things they have done to keep safe
- Recognise an individual’s strengths
- Give information that directly relates to what they have asked (must be age appropriate)
- Assist with re-establishing social networks and/or reuniting families
- Be culturally sensitive
- Refer to a psychologist/social worker/mental health professional, in consultation with parents, where reactions are concerning (some children have experienced loss of family, friends, homes, pets and their reactions need to be carefully monitored)

**Crisis Management Team**

**Remember:** Working with those traumatised involves:
- giving comfort
- showing concern
- connecting with family/friends
- giving information
- communication from lead coordinator