

Information for Parents, Families and Carers

Returning to fire affected areas

How do I decide whether to bring my children to see our home if it has been affected by fire?

Only you as a parent or carer know whether it is appropriate for your child to return home.

As you may also be under considerable stress at this time you may wish to seek professional advice about this decision.

If you have any concerns or questions you should discuss these with a counsellor before returning

In general it is important to consider the physical safety of the area and the age of the child. Younger children may not be able to fully understand what is going on and become distressed.

You should also think about your ability to give the children support at the time of a return home.

You know your child's personality better than anyone. Take into account how they normally react in different situations and the circumstances under which they left.

Children who were evacuated through the fire may find the return very traumatic.

Wherever possible preparing the children will be important, making sure you have enough help to support them.

How can I best support my children during this time?

Children and adolescents will look to you, as parents, families and carers, for comfort and reassurance in times of adversity.

Therefore it is important that you as parents, families and carers are focusing on your own emotional needs and seeking support if you need it.

By providing calm, comforting and safe environments, children and adolescents are more likely to express their feelings and work with you to develop strategies for working towards healing.

Wherever possible try and keep children connected to their friends, neighbours and community, and maintain their routines. This will help children

regain a sense of predictability and safety.

Engage older children during their recovery, giving them a sense of control and ongoing connection to their community.

It is important to limit younger children's exposure to graphic photos and video footage.

Wherever possible, monitor what older children are seeing and hearing through the media, and give them opportunities to talk about their reactions.

How can I get help?

Telephone support services are available:

- Bushfire Hotline (24 hours) 1800 240 667
- Nurse on Call (24 hours) 1300 60 60 24
- Parentline (8am to midnight, Mon to Fri, 10am to 10pm on weekends) 13 22 89
- Maternal and Child Health Line (24 hours) 13 22 29

For more information visit www.education.vic.gov.au

