

# Bushfire Response Program

*Preparing learning  
communities for the  
bushfire season*



With delivery partners



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# Be You Bushfire Response Program webinar handout

Included below are reflective questions referred to during the webinar along with links to additional information, resources and references.

## Links to resources

Please find below a selection of resources either shared during the webinar or used in preparation for the webinar.

### Be You resources

- Be You Wellbeing Tools for You (educators):  
<https://beyou.edu.au/resources/tools-and-guides/wellbeing-tools-for-you>
- Be You Wellbeing fact sheet:  
<https://beyou.edu.au/fact-sheets/wellbeing>
- Be You Events:  
<https://beyou.edu.au/resources/events>
- Be You Bushfire Response Program:  
<https://beyou.edu.au/bushfire-response-program>

### Emerging Minds resources

- Emerging Minds Community Trauma Toolkit:  
<https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/toolkits/community-trauma-toolkit/>
- How educators can prepare children for natural disasters resource:  
<https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/how-educators-can-prepare-their-students-for-a-natural-disaster/>
- Watch the video of Briony Towers and Strathewen Principal, Jane Hayward, discussing the Bushfire Education Partnership operating in Strathewen and Arthur's Creek:  
<https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/strathewen-arthurs-creek-bushfire-education-partnership/>
- Listen to a podcast related to children and young people's misconceptions to bushfires:  
<https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/podcast/disaster-preparedness-myths-and-programs-that-hold-promise/>

## Other resources

- For information around the AIM approach and psychological preparation for natural disasters visit:
  - <https://www.psychology.org.au/getmedia/c24bf1ba-a5fc-45d5-a982-835873148b9a/Psychological-preparation-for-natural-disasters.pdf>
  - <https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/publications/biblio/bnh-6508>
  - <https://hazards.colorado.edu/news/research-counts/new-school-a-modern-approach-to-disaster-risk-reduction-and-resilience-education-for-children>
- Watch 'A walk through Strathewen's fire history' – a film by the Grade 5/6 students at Harkaway Primary School:  
<https://vimeo.com/304250923>
- The Harkaway students' bushfire education manifesto is a great example of student feedback about what makes for effective bushfire education:  
<https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/resources/poster/7462>

## Attendee question and answer responses

### Trauma and resources:

#### Q. How do we find the High Five Model?

<https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/how-parents-and-caregivers-can-prepare-for-a-natural-disaster/>

#### Q. Is it ok to share your own personal experiences with bushfires (in a one-on-one situation with a student)? (Nicola Plalfrey)

Whenever sharing your personal experiences with a student, whether it be about disasters or other events, it is important to first consider the purpose of the sharing. Is it to create a sense of shared experience, empathy, or something else? How will sharing your experience impact the young person? Will it further distress them, or make them think you are more interested in your own experiences than their own? How comfortable are you in sharing your experiences? How distressed might you get? Often, we are surprised by how much recounting our own frightening experiences can upset us, and this is not always helpful for young people. If you decide to share your experiences, it is often best to keep it brief, don't include unnecessary details, and direct the conversation back to the young person, for example: *"I lived in an area where there were fires when I was younger, I found that after the fires I felt a whole range of things, angry, sad, worried. I wonder if you have felt any of those things?"*

#### Q. In your experience of working through the children and their learning, how does the transference of parent/carer trauma impact their learning experience? (Nicola Palfrey)

Children's wellbeing, including their experiences at school, socially and academically are inextricably linked to their parent/carer's wellbeing. Disasters interrupt and disrupt parenting, add increased pressures, and worries and time constraints. All of this can impact on a child's ability to engage and learn at school.

To learn we need to feel safe, be rested, engaged, and focused. These are difficult when families are stressed, children worry about their parents, so concentration at school can be difficult.

However, with the support of the learning community, the relationships kids have at school with their teachers, peers and other adults, they can engage and the impact on the lifelong learning will be minimised.

### **Early Childhood:**

#### **Q. How do you collaborate with very young (pre-school aged) children? (Briony Towers)**

Unfortunately, evidence-based bushfire education resources for early childhood are thin on the ground. Most evidence-based bushfire education resources tend to cater for upper primary school and lower secondary school students. This is mainly due to the fact that this is bushfire is included the Australian Curriculum at these year levels.

Our work with very young children has tended to focus on house fire safety and other household emergencies with a particular on focus when and how to call Triple Zero. Learning how to identify a legitimate emergency and respond appropriately are really valuable skills for young children to learn. To support that learning in the classroom, we have collaborated with the Triple Zero Australia Working Group to develop the *Triple Zero Kids Challenge* which includes an online digital game and a Teacher's Guide, which contains a suite of learning activities for young children.

You can access the game and the teacher's guide here: <http://kids.triplezero.gov.au/>  
The learning outcomes in the *Triple Zero Kids Challenge* provide an excellent foundation for learning about bushfire hazards and other emergencies.

For very young children, I also highly recommend the 'Birdie's Tree' story books and resources that have been developed by the *Children's Health Queensland Hospital and Health Service*. These resources are evidence-based and have received excellent feedback from early childhood educators. <https://www.childrens.health.qld.gov.au/natural-disaster-recovery/>

With regard to bushfire education, early childhood educators we have engaged with have seen a lot of value in exploring the role of fire in the regeneration and renewal of our natural eco-systems (e.g. certain vegetation types require heat for the seeds to germinate). Some preschools are also incorporating fire into nature-based play and cooking activities. While this approach is not without controversy, research by the University of Newcastle has found that "exposing children to risk boosted their confidence, teamwork skills and awareness of safety and danger".

Find more information here: <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/playing-with-fire-the-childcare-centres-exposing-children-to-risk-20190713-p526ue.html>

Indigenous Fire Stewardship also provides a wonderful entry point for younger children to learn about fire in the environment.

The 'Firestick Project' at Dixons Creek Primary School in Victoria's Yarra Ranges involved Grade 5/6 students: however, it is a fantastic example of how learning about fire from the perspective of Aboriginal Custodians can provide children with a greater sense of safety and security. Early childhood educators we collaborate with have suggested that this kind of learning could be adapted for younger children.

- <https://www.firesticks.org.au/firesticks-recognised-in-national-resilience-award/>
- <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/ajem-jan-2019-a-groundswell-of-caring-for-country/>
- <https://www.theage.com.au/national/victoria/traditional-fire-skills-help-kids-who-grew-up-in-black-saturday-s-wake-20181102-p50dlg.html>

I also recommend sharing the bushfire planning guide below with the parents at your preschool. It is based on in-depth research with children aged 5-12 years and provides parents with evidence-based advice on how to involve their children in bushfire planning. The guide has received a lot of really positive feedback from families, including families who have had to evacuate their homes. <https://www.bushfirecrc.com/resources/product/involve-your-kids-bushfire-survival-planning-ebook>

#### **Q. Should we set up play scenarios for young children? (Briony Towers/Nicola Palfrey)**

Queensland Centre for Perinatal & Infant Mental Health have done, and are doing, quite a lot of work in this disaster education/early childhood space. They were working with UQ to develop resources and curriculum. Below are some resources that might be useful to refer to:

- <https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/natural-disaster-curriculum-in-the-early-childhood-sector/>  
This video featuring Dr. Anita Nepean-Hutchinson, Psychologist from the Queensland Centre for Perinatal & Infant Mental Health, discusses the role of educators and childcare workers in helping children understand and cope with natural disaster.
- <https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/the-importance-of-story-and-play-for-young-children-following-a-natural-disaster/>  
This video, featuring Andrea Murray from the Queensland Centre for Perinatal & Infant Mental Health, discusses the importance of stories and play for children after a disaster, and how adults can support this.
- <https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/the-use-of-therapeutic-story-books-following-a-natural-disaster/>  
This video, featuring Dr. Andrea Baldwin from the Queensland Centre for Perinatal & Infant Mental Health, introduces the Birdie's Tree resources, which are a set of storybooks for children explaining some of the causes and impacts of disaster. These books, along with assistance from supportive adults, can help children to make sense of and cope with disaster events.
- <https://emergingminds.com.au/resources/queensland-centre-for-perinatal-infant-mental-health-natural-disaster-resources/>  
This video, featuring Andrea Murray, talks about the development of the Birdie's Tree storybooks by the Queensland Centre for Perinatal & Infant Mental Health team. The books cover flood, cyclone, fire and drought. The stories try to portray disasters from children's point-of-view and help them understand the event.

**Q. Our preschool was asked to also be a safe designation. I am unsure how to put a community/preschool fire policy in place. Any ideas? (Briony Towers/Leigh Johnson)**

Legislation, policies, and procedures for emergency management planning in education facilities vary from state to state. You can start by contacting your designated education authority in your state (e.g. Government Department of Education, Association of Independent Schools, Catholic Education Office) and finding out what guidelines, resources and support they have available for emergency management planning in preschools. Your municipal council should also have resources and support available to ensure you are able to develop a robust policy and procedure, especially if your facility is a designated refuge. I would also recommend contacting the community safety division of your state bushfire agency to find out what guidance and support they can provide. We also know that an existing relationship between schools/preschools and the local fire brigade has major benefits for emergency management planning, so reach out to them too. Finally, if there are other educational facilities in your local area, reach out to them as well to find out what their plans are and how they are approaching things – a coordinated approach is really important.

**Q. We are quite remote – how do you support the community but ensure preschool resources are kept safe? ((Briony Towers/Leigh Johnson)**

This is a really interesting question. If there is a short lead time to prepare the preschool for an influx of community members, this could be really challenging. However, this is something that can be considered as part of your emergency plan.

Making decisions in advance about what resources to lock away in storage or move offsite and documenting those decisions in your emergency plan will make things much easier on the day. The children could also be involved in decision-making regarding which resources (books, games, toys) are most valuable and should be prioritised for safe keeping. They may also have ideas about what resources it would be good to keep out for children to play with while they are taking refuge in the space.

You may also want to consider setting up a child friendly space within your facility. Save the Children set up child friendly spaces in emergency relief centres in fire affected areas during the 2019/2020 fire season. You can read more about child friendly spaces here:

- <https://www.savethechildren.org.au/our-stories/child-friendly-spaces>
- <https://www.savethechildren.org.au/media/media-releases/child-friendly-space-nsw-bushfires>
- <https://www.savethechildren.org.au/our-stories/a-home-away-from-home>
- <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/save-children-sets-child-friendly-spaces-help-bushfire-hit-communities>

**School:**

**Q. Some believe that schools already have an overcrowded curriculum – and there are content assessment and reporting requirements to parents – so where do you fit in this teaching? (Leigh Johnson)**

Great question – and one which casts a very long shadow. The simple truth is that you can't fit in this teaching. It is not about teaching – it is about learning. From this perspective the

whole game changes. When we as professionals are intimate with the curriculum, we can spot the connections between the learning that is happening, and the curriculum documents. When we start with the curriculum, and fit in our students the focus is on discharging our teaching and accountability obligations. When we start with our learners and focus on equipping them to produce something with their learning – we achieve the same curriculum outcomes but not through the neat and controlled structures designed to make life convenient for the adults in the classroom.

Nonetheless – because we live in the real world, we've set up our structures to facilitate a guaranteed and viable curriculum outside of our child-centered disaster risk reduction education program. Put simply, we cover the curriculum in all the other stuff we do.

In Victoria, the VCAA Capabilities, Humanities and Technologies all fit very neatly into this topic – you just need to know it when you see it.

**Q. What are some activities to get my students out of the school and into the community to spread awareness? Or reduce fire risks? (Leigh Johnson/Briony Towers)**

Both Anglesea Primary School and Strathewen Primary School run 'community presentation nights' where the students run interactive workshops and present films and other learning artifacts to their parents, local brigade members, and other community members. Anglesea Primary hold their events at the fire station, while Strathewen Primary hold theirs at the community hall. Our research has found that these events are a highly effective method of community engagement. You can read more about this in our evaluation report, which can be downloaded here:

[https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/sites/default/files/managed/downloads/evaluation\\_of\\_survive\\_and\\_thrive\\_paper\\_final.pdf](https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/sites/default/files/managed/downloads/evaluation_of_survive_and_thrive_paper_final.pdf)

Another great way to get children out into the community is to connect with other schools by using a 'kids teaching kids' model. Anglesea Primary have adopted this approach in the past and it was a great way for the kids to share their knowledge with other children and demonstrate the benefits of bushfire education to teachers in other schools. The kids teaching kids approach at Anglesea was driven by CFA staff member Emma Taunt who had previously worked for Melbourne Water's Kids Teaching Kids Program which is focused on sustainability. <https://www.kidsteachingkids.com.au/>