

Talking Matters

www.talkingmatters.com.au Ph: 8255 7137

Helping your child to reach their potential



Supporting children through time of fire

Many children in our community have been impacted by the recent fires. This may be directly through property damage and evacuation, or indirectly through seeing smoke, watching the news or hearing reports on the radio. It is common that children experience anxiety as a result of disasters such as fire. We hope that the following dot points gathered through a range of different sources will help you and your family in dealing with the fires.



Giving children knowledge about the fire (appropriate to their age) can help them understand the situation better. Some children will need reassurance that they are going to be ok, while others (typically older, school age children) will benefit from knowing the facts.

- Ask your child what they already know about the fire. It is likely that they may have misinterpreted what they have seen or heard on the news.
- Ask your child what they would like to know about the fires (let them know that they can ask any and as many questions as they like).
- Ask about how they are feeling and let them know that you understand how they are feeling and that it is ok to feel sad, scared, worried etc. (There is no right or wrong way to feel).

Limiting exposure to news programs and social media and/or educating your children about what they are seeing on the news during times of fire may help to reduce anxiety. Children who are seeing constant footage of the fire may think that a fire keeps happening over and over again. For example following September 11, it is reported that children thought that planes were continually flying into buildings as they continued to see the footage on the news.

Giving children roles in fire safety plans, prior to a fire, during an evacuation and following a fire can assist in their understanding of the situation to help reduce anxiety. Let them know what plans you have in place to make sure that everyone is as safe as possible when disasters such as fires happen. Let your children 'help' in making the families action plan, such as choosing which toys they would like to take with them.

Children enjoy helping others. You may like to find ways for your children to help during or after the fire to help support your community. Children may like to donate toys or clothes they no longer use, draw pictures or cards to people who have suffered in the fires or helped to fight the fires.

Try to create as much normalcy in your daily routines as possible to help keep your children feel calm and safe.

Use simple social stories to help your children understand what has happened and what the family will do in the future if something similar happens. You can use the social stories created by Talking Matters or make up your own to suit your family's needs. The Talking Matters social stories can be downloaded from

http://www.talkingmatters.com.au/resources/downloads/cat_vie/15-social-stories



Use interactive games such as those provided on the Country Fire Association website. These games are specific to primary school and secondary school. There are also resources available for teachers <http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/kids-schools/primary-school-resources/>



With time, most children will 'bounce back' following trauma. However, if you are worried about your children's ongoing fears following the fires, or your own health and wellbeing you may like to visit your GP and consider a referral to a psychologist.

For further, more detailed information please see the following resources:

Australian Psychological Society 'Helping Children who have been affected by bushfires: Guidelines for parents and caregivers' <http://www.psychology.org.au/Assets/Files/Guidelines-Bushfires-Children.pdf>

Australian Psychological Society 'Preparing children for the threat of bushfires: Information for parents and caregivers' <http://www.psychology.org.au/Assets/Files/Preparing-children-for-threat-bushfires.pdf>

Autism Tasmania 'Tips and suggestions for children with ASD' <http://www.autismtas.org.au/attachments/article/15/Bushfire%20social%20script.pdf>

Tanya Ashworth 'SA bushfire: My child's nightmare became a reality' <http://www.essentialkids.com.au/younger-kids/kids-development/sa-bushfire-my-childs-nightmare-became-a-reality-20150105-12i36r.html>

Fire Note 'Children's knowledge of bushfire hazards' by Briony Towers http://www.bushfirecrc.com/sites/default/files/managed/resource/childrens_knowledge_of_bushfire_hazards.pdf

"L'il Larrikins" Bushfire awareness videos for children by Code2Australia http://www.code2.com.au/community_bushfire.html

Games and activities for bushfire awareness for primary and school aged children by CFA Victoria <http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au/kids-schools/>