

# BUSHFIRE RESPONSE

## Tips for Providing Emotional & Psychological Support



Stressful and life-threatening events such as those caused by the bushfire crisis can have a profound impact on our wellbeing.

Common thoughts, feelings and behaviours include:



- sadness, feeling teary or overly emotional
- feeling fearful, frightened or anxious
- questioning what happened and why
- sleep and appetite changes
- impacts on ability to concentrate
- feeling thankful for your own blessings while also feeling guilty about those less fortunate

**These are everyday reactions to extraordinary events.**

The severity of individual reactions will vary according to a person's proximity to the event, losses experienced, or closeness to others affected, (such as loved ones who have lost family, homes, pets or businesses).

### Triggers

In the short-term there may be lots of reminders of the fires for some people, including:



- the smell of smoke
- the sound of aircraft overhead or emergency vehicle sirens
- seeing blackened bush and affected landscapes

### Starting the conversation

Sometimes, a simple conversation may be just the emotional and psychological support that someone needs. At times you might find yourself being the supportive listener in that conversation. It can be easy to underestimate the power of just listening and empathically responding, without having to fix anything or taking responsibility for somebody else's distress. Listen to understand rather than to reply.

**If enquiring about how someone is coping, it's good to seek permission to open a conversation.**

**Ask open questions like:**

- "How are you going?"
- "Would you like to talk about it?"



## TV, radio and social media

Television, radio and social media coverage can easily contribute to the barrage of information we are exposed to. While access to this information may be crucial in the middle of a crisis, in the following days it can also be useful to limit exposure.

## When to seek professional help

Signs of continuing distress include:

- feeling overwhelmed
- being more prone to panic
- loss of interest in usual day-to-day activities

If you notice that these reactions are not diminishing, or that they are significantly impacting yours or another's sense of wellbeing, professional support may be of some assistance.



## Emotional and psychological professional services

### Free telephone counselling for people affected by the fires

APM Community Support Line **1800 276 113**

### Anglicare Counselling services

Face-to-face, telephone or skype counselling for adults and children. Anglicare staff are available in locations including: Nowra, Ulladulla, Moruya, Wollongong, Campbelltown, Parramatta, Summer Hill and other Sydney sites. Phone **1300 651 728** or email [counselling@anglicare.org.au](mailto:counselling@anglicare.org.au)

### Medicare Bushfire Recovery

People affected by bushfires are able to self-refer (or be referred by their GP) to an eligible allied mental health provider. For those already receiving assistance via the Better Access initiative (up to 10 Medicare supported sessions with a Social Worker or Psychologist via a Mental Health Care Plan) an additional 10 sessions are available. Psychologists and Social Workers have to be accredited with Medicare to provide this service.

### Department of Human Services

For assistance in accessing disaster recovery assistance and payments call **180 22 66**

### 24/7 Telephone Helplines

Mental Health Line	<b>1800 011 511</b>
Beyond Blue	<b>1300 224 636</b>
Lifeline	<b>13 11 14</b>
Mensline	<b>1300 789 978</b>
Kids Helpline	<b>1300 551 800</b>

PO Box 284, Castle Hill NSW 1765

**1300 111 278**  
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