



# Back to school and your child's wellbeing

The recent bushfire emergency may have created distress for many children, their families and communities, which is why the Australian Government is providing a range of support to help those affected.

## Mental health support for children, young adults, parents and carers

Schools and early childhood education services are central, stabilising forces across communities that provide safe spaces for children and young adults to be in times of crisis, need and change.

The effects of the 2019–20 bushfires may be felt by Australian children and young adults over the coming days, months and even years. It is not uncommon to have trouble adjusting and/or to feel unsafe after a traumatic event. Children and young adults can pick up tension, uncertainty, confusion and fear experienced by those around them following traumatic events and may have some sleep disturbance, fear or anxiety. If your child experiences these problems or their behaviour seems changed it may be sensible to seek help.

As the new school year begins, the Australian Government is providing immediate assistance to support the mental health and wellbeing of children and families impacted by the bushfires.

Parents, carers and teachers have an important role to play in creating a sense of calm, and reassuring children and young adults, but sometimes it can be difficult to know where to start. Making your own mental health a priority as well as familiarising yourself with the support and services available are good first steps.

Please talk to your General Practitioner or school leaders about the resources available to you and your family as the 2020 school year gets underway. You may not need help now but you may need it later in the year. A list of support services and resources follows.

## 24/7 Telephone services offering counselling and support

### Lifeline Australia

Lifeline is a crisis support service that provides short-term support at any time for people who are having difficulty coping or staying safe. **13 11 14** | [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

### Kids Helpline

Kids Helpline is a free, private and confidential phone and online counselling service for young people aged 5 to 25 years. **1800 55 1800** | [www.kidshelpline.com.au](http://www.kidshelpline.com.au)

### Beyond Blue

Beyond Blue is available by phone or online via chat or email, to provide support on a range of mental health issues. **1300 22 4636** | [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

### Suicide Call-Back Service

For anyone considering suicide, living with someone who is considering suicide, or bereaved by suicide, the Suicide Call Back Service is available. **1300 659 467** | [www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au](http://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au)

### MensLine Australia

MensLine Australia is a telephone and online counselling service for men. **1300 78 99 78** | [www.mensline.org.au](http://www.mensline.org.au)

### Open Arms – Veterans and Families Counselling

Open Arms provides current serving armed forces personnel, veterans and their families with free and confidential counselling, group treatment programs and community and peer networks. **1800 011 046** | [www.openarms.gov.au](http://www.openarms.gov.au)



## Face to face support

### Free assistance

Emergency distress and trauma counselling, including up to 10 free mental health support sessions, is available for individuals, families and emergency services personnel directly impacted by the bushfire emergency.

The services are delivered by allied health professionals at recovery centres, Services Australia centres and mental health providers commissioned by Primary Health Networks.

[www.health.gov.au/health-topics/emergency-health-management/bushfire-information-and-support/australian-government-mental-health-response-to-bushfire-trauma](http://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/emergency-health-management/bushfire-information-and-support/australian-government-mental-health-response-to-bushfire-trauma)

### Your General Practitioner

If you or your child experiences persistent health issues that interfere with your lives, please talk to your local General Practitioner, who is your gateway to mental health and other health services.

[www.healthdirect.gov.au/australian-health-services](http://www.healthdirect.gov.au/australian-health-services)

### Primary Health Networks

Primary Health Networks (PHNs) play a critical role in supporting individuals and communities by ensuring patients receive the right care in the right place at the right time.

Bushfire Trauma Response Coordinators have been employed by PHNs in severely impacted fire-affected regions to provide a single point of contact for individuals and communities. To find your local PHN use the map locator tool at:

[www.health.gov.au/phn](http://www.health.gov.au/phn)

### Mental health liaison officers from Beyond Blue

Liaison officers from Beyond Blue will work with local schools and early childhood education and care services in bushfire-affected communities as part of *Be You*, the Australian Government's national education initiative to support child and youth mental health.

Schools and early childhood education and care services can sign up to *Be You* for free at any time.

Talk to your school leaders for more information about how liaison officers will be working with students and staff.

[www.beyou.edu.au](http://www.beyou.edu.au)

### School chaplains

The Australian Government is offering extra funding for school chaplains, which will be available to state and territory governments on request.

The National School Chaplaincy Program supports the wellbeing of students and school communities by providing pastoral care services that assist with crisis situations and building student resilience. Talk to your chaplain or school leaders for further information.

[www.education.gov.au/national-school-chaplaincy-program](http://www.education.gov.au/national-school-chaplaincy-program)

## Counsellors

The Australian Psychological Society (APS) and the Australian Red Cross have a network of APS psychologists deployed through the Red Cross to provide assistance across bushfire-affected areas.

[www.psychology.org.au/Find-a-Psychologist](http://www.psychology.org.au/Find-a-Psychologist)

## headspace

headspace provides free or low cost services to young people aged between 12 to 25 years old, their families and friends. To assist with managing an increased demand for services, selected headspace sites in fire-affected areas will also be provided with additional funding to ensure that young people can get support when they need it. You can find a map of headspace sites on their website.

[www.headspace.org.au](http://www.headspace.org.au)

## Online resources

### Emerging Minds

A Community Trauma Toolkit is among the online resources available to adults to help support children's mental health during and after a disaster or traumatic event. The toolkit is grouped into the timeframes surrounding a natural disaster — preparedness, immediate, short-term recovery, and long-term recovery.

[www.emergingminds.com.au](http://www.emergingminds.com.au)

### Student Wellbeing Hub

The Student Wellbeing Hub provides age specific and tailored information in an online space for educators, parents and students. You can access practical, evidenced-informed strategies in plain language to help reduce the risk of anxiety and depression in children.

[www.studentwellbeinghub.edu.au](http://www.studentwellbeinghub.edu.au)

### Learning Potential

Learning Potential provides parents with practical tips and information about how to support their children as they return to school and throughout the year. All content can be accessed, free, through a phone app and a website.

[www.learningpotential.gov.au](http://www.learningpotential.gov.au)

### Head to Health

The Australian Government's digital gateway to information, advice, and free and low cost phone and online mental health services and supports.

[www.headtohealth.gov.au](http://www.headtohealth.gov.au)

**The National Bushfire Recovery Agency is coordinating the national response to help rebuild communities.**

[www.bushfirerecovery.gov.au](http://www.bushfirerecovery.gov.au)