

# Supporting Young People Healing from a Natural Disaster

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# Acknowledgement of Country



# Be You Bushfire Response Program



**Be You Bushfire Response Program**

The Bushfire Response Program provides tailored mental health support to schools and early learning services affected by bushfires across Australia.

Informed by placed-based and community-led principles, the Program empowers bushfire-affected communities to lead their own recovery.

The Bushfire Response Program is led by Beyond Blue in partnership with Early Childhood Australia, headspace and Emerging Minds.

The Program is a part of Be You, Australia's national mental health in education initiative funded by the Australian Government. You can learn more about Be You at [beyou.edu.au](http://beyou.edu.au)

**What the Program offers**

The Bushfire Response Program offers schools and early learning services a package of support comprising four primary elements: Contact Liaison Officers, trauma training, recovery planning, service mapping.

- A partnership between Beyond Blue, headspace Schools, Emerging Minds & Early Childhood Australia
- Recovery support for all schools affected by bushfires and natural disasters.
- Program offers;
  - Trauma training, support & guidance
  - Recovery planning
  - Educator Wellbeing Workshops
  - Regional mental health service mapping

# 7 Identified Regions in NSW



# Understanding Community Trauma

**Trauma is not the event itself, but the way a person responds to the event when it is overwhelming and beyond the person's ability to cope.**

Community Trauma from Natural Disasters:

- Impact entire communities.
- Involve significant damage and destruction., e.g. loss of home
- The effects are often long-term – financial, social and emotional.
- Can result in grief, destruction of young people and adults sense of safety and security
- **Can change a person's view of the world.**
  - E.g. “the world is no longer a safe place”



Source: *Emerging Minds, Community Trauma Toolkit*

# Trauma Responses to a Natural Disaster

Some examples are;

- **Feelings:** fear, anxiety, sadness, guilt, anger
- **Bodily/Physical Experiences:** tense, jumpy, limited sleep, appetite, bodily pain
- **Behaviour:** withdrawal from normal routine/social relationships, difficulty concentrating, difficulty separating from parent/carer
- **Thoughts:** worrying thoughts (“am I safe”, “will this happen again”, etc.), memories.

# Trauma Responses Over Time

Every reaction is different - all normal



Every young person reacts differently to trauma. Most young people cope well.



Some young people will be distressed but will recover fairly quickly.



For others, symptoms continue and may even increase over time.

*Source: Emerging Minds, Community Trauma Toolkit*

# Heidi's Story

video from headspace Bega  
centre

<https://youtu.be/lqWXOdP-n5k>



# Approaches to Support Recovery

## Relationships

- building positive, predictable and attuned relationships

## Routine

- maintaining consistency and predictability can reduce unnecessary stress and improving feelings of safety.

## Emotional Regulation

- modelling and assisting to self regulate through naming feelings, expressing, movement and calming techniques

## Belonging

- creating connectedness to adults and peers because the environment is physically and emotionally safe

## Capacity

- providing opportunities to build competency and mastery skills to grow feelings of control and hope

Source: Research Article: Hobfoll, S. E., Watson, P., Bell, C. C., Bryant, R. A., et al (2007). Five essential elements of immediate and mid term mass trauma intervention: Empirical evidence. *Psychiatry*, 70(4), 283-315.

## Chatbox Activity

*How are you adopting these approaches in your role already?*

# Anniversaries & Monitoring

- Be aware of possible triggers, e.g. hot weather, smoke from back burning, visibility of fire trucks
- Young people, children and adults will experience emotional distress leading up to anniversary whether or not aware of date
- Monitor young people over this period and during holidays, and know when to activate additional supports
- Bring up topic of anniversary in conversation, especially if noticed a change in behaviour
- Promote help-seeking for all family members & understand trauma reactions in adults can affect parent styles and relationship.
- Discover local community events and encourage young person participation
- Involve youth voice in community events and disaster preparedness as research shows young people feel safer when have sense of control and are heard.

*Source: Emerging Minds, Community Trauma Toolkit*

# Caring for your own wellbeing as a priority



# Online Supports

## For Young People:

- [Eheadspace.org.au](https://eheadspace.org.au) – webchat/group forums

## For Community Professionals:

- Emerging Minds – Community Trauma Toolkit

## For Educators: Be You

## For Parents:

- Red Cross Guide – “Helping young people cope with a crisis”

# Thank you



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