

# bushfire resource pack

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Batemans Bay website



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# maintaining a healthy headspace during the bushfire season - supporting your young person

## Supporting your young person

The timing and duration of bushfire danger seasons vary across different regions in Australia. While the threat of bushfires can directly affect people living in high-risk areas, it's also normal to have reactions if you live further away and are indirectly affected (e.g., by media exposure or hearing from others).

Taking positive action and anticipating your own and your young person's emotional reactions during the bushfire season can be helpful for your wellbeing during and after this time.

## Looking after yourself

Although you might feel like looking after yourself is not a priority, it is important to practise self-care. It can improve your ability to care for your young person going through a tough time. Talking to a trusted other, such as a family member, friend, Elder, or counsellor about any concerns and feelings you are having can be helpful.



Modelling self-care and help-seeking behaviours can be particularly important during the bushfire season, because your young person might look to you and be encouraged to also practise self-care.



## Tips to support your young person's healthy headspace during the bushfire season

The following principles of Psychological First Aid (PFA) can help to guide you in supporting your young person at all times during the bushfire season:



### Listen and look

- listen to questions and concerns
- be patient and understanding
- look at your young person's behaviour.



### Protect

- focus on the steps needed to maintain your and your person's physical and emotional safety, or to return to safety as soon as possible
- resources such as the Red Cross RediPlan can help you stay focused and prioritise actions
- keep your young person informed of next steps.



### Connect

- support your young person to feel connected to information, familiar people and places
- if you get separated during an emergency, reunite as soon as possible.

# Tips to support your young person

## Listen to your young person

During bushfire response and recovery, young people's experiences can be overlooked. Listening to young people is important because it helps them feel understood and can make them feel more in control. It can also help them to process their thoughts and feelings. Providing young people with reassurance and emotional support can help them feel more secure. Remember that you don't have to have all the answers. If you're unsure about how to answer a question, work with your young person to find out together.

## Get informed

To prepare for an emergency, discuss ways of how you and your young person could work together. This may help your young person feel proactive and more in control. This could include the steps to take in an emergency (e.g., what to take with them when evacuation is required; where to meet in case you get separated).

It's important to keep informed about bushfire developments. This includes monitoring official warnings. It's also important to calmly communicate accurate information with your young person. At the same time, be aware that constant exposure to bushfire-focused news can increase negative feelings. You and your young person may want to discuss ways to help them and your household access media safely (e.g., set limits for media use, manage automatic app alerts, or unfollow content or pages).

## Connect with others

Keeping in contact with friends, family, and neighbours, especially during days with high risks for bushfires can help people feel more grounded. It can also help you and your young person draw on your strengths by getting connected with people who are reassuring and comforting.

## Talk about your young person's role in supporting others

You may also notice young people feel responsible for caring for other family members or friends. For instance, those young people who have younger siblings might feel responsible for the wellbeing of their siblings. Remember to regularly check in with all of your young people about their worries. Make sure to talk to your young people about whether they feel supported enough.

## Practise calming techniques

In times of heightened stress, practising calming techniques can help with feeling grounded (e.g., taking slow and gentle breaths). You might want to encourage your young person to access apps or websites that help with feeling calm and maybe even practise the calming exercises together. Note that the use of alcohol and other drugs can be counterproductive.

## Get into a routine as soon as you can

When the danger has subsided, returning to old routines or establishing new routines is helpful. For your young person, this can include going back to school, uni, TAFE, or their job, engaging in hobbies, and seeing friends. Encourage them to be involved in the activities that give them a sense of purpose.

## Getting support

**It's normal for you or your young person to experience a variety of reactions to the bushfire season. This doesn't mean either of you will have ongoing problems. If you or your young person are noticing a significant impact on your emotions, your daily activities or you're not finding any improvement, it's important to get professional help.**



**Make sure to talk to your young people about whether they feel supported enough.**



**If you or someone you know is going through a tough time you can get help and support from headspace, your school, TAFE or university wellbeing service or your local health provider. For more information, to find your nearest headspace centre, or for online and telephone support, visit [headspace.org.au](https://www.headspace.org.au)**

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# young people show resilience in the face of eco-anxiety

Over half of young people

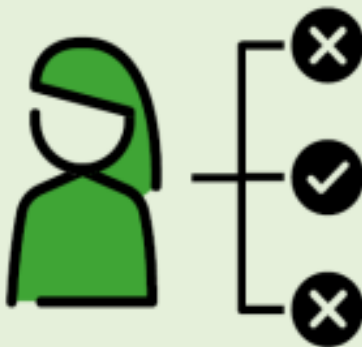


feel fearful of the future due to climate change (53%)

1 in 5



say climate change is affecting their daily lives (22%)



Many are worried they won't have access to the same opportunities their parents had due to climate change (42%)

One third



say climate change is the reason they are hesitant to have children (34%)



Almost half are worried whether they're personally doing enough to have an impact on climate change (46%) - while many feel their actions won't be enough to make a difference anyway (50%)

**Taking an active role in the fight against climate change can help young people feel empowered and alleviate anxiety. Consider the below tips:**



**Connect with like-minded individuals:**

Join local climate action groups or online communities



**Take small actions:**

Reduce waste, use public transport and opt for eco-friendly alternatives



**Stay informed:**

Seek reliable sources of information about climate change



**Practice self-care:**

Spend time in nature or practice mindfulness



**Advocate for change:**

Speak up about climate issues and share concerns with friends, family, and policymakers



**Know when to take breaks:**

The amount of information out there about climate change can be overwhelming. It's OK to step away from the news cycle to recharge

# useful apps

Even though these apps are designed for specific situations, they can be handy whenever you need them.



## WorryTime

An app by ReachOut to help control everyday stress and anxiety by giving you a place to store worries, and alerting you when it's time to think about them. Available on iOS and android.



## Smiling Mind

A website and app teaching mindfulness meditation to young people (7-22 yrs) and adults. Requires sign-up but is a free account. Available on iOS and android.



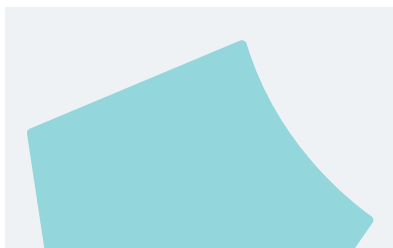
## Calm Harm

Calm Harm provides tasks that help you resist or manage the urge to self-harm. You can add your own tasks and it's completely private and password protected. Available on iOS and android.



## Breakup Shakeup

An app by ReachOut that provides ideas for fun, easy things to do to help young people (14-25 yrs) cope after a breakup. Available on iOS.



It's important to remember that apps and digital tools are not a replacement for professional therapy. If you're in urgent need of help or someone to talk to, please don't hesitate to reach out to a crisis hotline or a mental health professional.



# understanding depression

**The word depression is often used when people are talking about times when they're feeling sad or down.**

However, depression and feeling depressed is more than feeling sad. Depression is when feelings of sadness, emptiness and irritability last longer than two weeks, affect most parts of a person's daily life, and get in the way of them doing things that they normally enjoy.

There is no simple reason why depression happens. For some, a mix of events or challenges can end up

affecting how they feel, think and act. Things like constant stress, unhealthy relationships, discrimination, bullying or social isolation. For some it can be connected to family history, or individual coping styles, but sometimes there's no clear reason, and that can be frustrating to understand.



*The good news is that people experiencing depression can and do get better.*



## Signs and symptoms

Depression can be different for everyone, but there are some common signs and symptoms. These can include experiencing some of the following changes for more than two weeks:

### Changes to feelings or emotions

Like feeling sad, numb, empty, irritable, guilty or like everything is too hard.

### Physical changes

Like feeling tired most of the time, difficulty sleeping, changes in appetite or unexplained aches or pains.

### Changes to thoughts

Like having unhelpful thoughts, finding it hard to concentrate, or having thoughts of self harm or suicide.

### Behaviour changes

Like withdrawing from family or friends, losing interest in previously enjoyed activities, not getting things done or using more alcohol and other drugs.

Many people experience some of these symptoms at different times in their lives. What makes depression different is that the symptoms affect a person's daily life, and they don't tend to go away easily.

Sometimes people with depression experience other mental health challenges too, such as anxiety. Some may also use alcohol and other drugs, but these can make people feel much worse in the long term.



## Depression and the link between suicide and self harm

Some young people who experience depression self harm or experience thoughts of suicide. Self harm and thoughts about suicide are often ways of trying to cope with difficult emotions.

If you have thoughts of suicide or self harm it's really important to talk to someone you trust, such as a family member, friend, an Elder, teacher or counsellor.

You can also develop a safety plan yourself to help cope with feelings of distress and suicidal thoughts by using the BeyondNow app ([beyondblue.org.au/beyondnow](http://beyondblue.org.au/beyondnow)).

**For immediate help contact triple zero (000) if it is an emergency.**

**12%**  
of young people aged 15-24 reported feeling depressed or are diagnosed with a depressive disorder (Lawrence et al 2015)<sup>2</sup>



## Getting support

**For some people, using these tips will be enough to manage their symptoms of depression. But if the depression has been going on for too long without improvement, it's important to get professional help. The sooner you get help, the sooner you can recover.**

## So what can I do?

**A part of depression means it can feel hard to find the energy or motivation to do these things. Sometimes it might feel like nothing will help. Try starting with one thing you know you can do, then slowly add things in step by step. This can build your confidence and help you feel like you're making progress.**



There are lots of things that you can do to improve how you feel and get better at managing tough times.



### Talk about it

It's a good idea to talk to someone that you trust about what's going on for you. Talking to others can help you feel understood and supported.

### Take care of yourself

Looking after our minds and bodies can help us with our general mental health and wellbeing. You can:

- eat well to improve your mood, energy levels and general health and wellbeing
- stay active to help boost your energy, manage stress and boost your mood
- limit your use of alcohol and other drugs.

### Get into life

Sometimes it can be difficult to do or think of enjoyable things when you're feeling low. It can take some extra effort but trying to do something that you used to enjoy, even if you don't feel like it can help lift your mood and energy.

### Learn skills for tough times

Learning new ways to manage the thoughts, feelings and physical sensations of depression can be helpful. Speaking to a mental health clinician is one way to explore these and learn new skills.



1. ABS. National Health Survey: first results, 2017–18 Australia. ABS cat. no. 4364.0.55.001. Canberra; 2018.

2. Lawrence D et al. The mental health of children and adolescents: Report on the Second Australian Child and Adolescent Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing [Internet]. 2015. Available from: <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/the-mental-health-of-children-and-adolescents>



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# understanding anxiety

## What is anxiety?

### It's more than feeling stressed or worried.

Anxiety is something that we all experience from time to time. It's our body's way of preparing us to face challenging situations.

Sometimes anxiety can help us perform better by helping us feel alert and motivated.

Anxiety can come and go – but for some people, it can stick around for a long time, or occur in situations where you wouldn't normally expect to feel anxious. This can end up having a big impact on their daily lives.

When this happens, it might be time to do something about it.

## Signs and symptoms

### Everyone experiences anxiety differently, but there are some common signs and symptoms.

#### Physical signs can include:

- racing heart
- faster breathing
- feeling tense or having aches (especially neck, shoulders and back)
- sweating or feeling dizzy
- shaking
- 'butterflies' or feeling sick in the stomach.

#### Thoughts can include:

- worrying about things a lot of the time
- feeling like your worries are out of control
- having trouble concentrating and paying attention
- worries that seem out of proportion.

#### Other signs can include:

- being unable to relax
- avoiding people or places like school, uni or TAFE or parties and socialising
- withdrawing from family and friends
- feeling annoyed, irritated or restless
- difficulty getting to sleep at night or waking up a lot during the night.

## Common types of anxiety disorders

Anxiety disorders involve more than temporary worries or fears. People can experience different types of anxiety disorders, but it's important to know that they can all be treated.

### Generalised anxiety disorder

Some people may worry, and feel their worries are out of control about many areas of life (i.e., work, studies, health). They might feel tense and nervous most of the time, have trouble sleeping or find it hard to concentrate.

### Social anxiety disorder

Some people may experience intense anxiety in social situations because of fear of embarrassment or judgement. This may lead to avoiding situations where there are other people.

### Separation anxiety disorder

Some people experience intense fear about being away from loved ones or worry about them being hurt.

### Agoraphobia

Some people feel intense anxiety about being in particular environments outside the home. This can include public spaces, public transport, enclosed spaces or crowds.

### Specific phobias

Some people may experience a fear of a particular situation or object – like spiders or animals – that leads to a person avoiding that situation or object.

### Panic disorder

Some people experience repeated panic attacks and ongoing fears about having more panic attacks.



# Anxiety and depression

**Many young people experiencing an anxiety disorder may also experience symptoms of depression. This can make things much more confusing. If you think this is happening for you, it's important to reach out for support.**

## What can I do to manage anxiety?

There are things you can try to help manage your anxiety so that it doesn't get in the way of your daily life.

### Care for yourself

Managing anxiety starts with good self-care. Try to eat well, get enough sleep and stay active to help your overall mental health and wellbeing.

### Talk about it

It's a good idea to talk about how you're feeling – whether it's with a trusted family member, friends, a teacher, coach, your mob or Elders. They can support you, help you understand what's going on, help you stick to your self-care goals and get extra help if needed.

### Notice your thinking patterns

Being aware of how your thoughts can influence your anxiety is an important step towards managing it. It can help you understand what contributes to your anxiety and what your triggers are. This can help you to handle them differently and learn new ways to respond.

### Be aware of avoidance

It's normal to want to avoid situations that make you feel anxious. It might work in the short-term, but over time it can make your anxiety feel worse. This is because you don't get the opportunity to learn that the thing you fear may not happen or be as bad as you think.

Learn some skills to cope with anxiety, like helpful self-talk and relaxation, then gradually face the things you fear and put your skills into action. As you realise you can manage anxious situations, you'll become more confident and motivated to keep going.

### Try new breathing strategies

Lots of anxiety symptoms involve a cycle of physical sensations – pounding heart, shortness of breath, trembling and butterflies in the stomach. Working on slowing your breathing is a good way to try to interrupt that cycle. There are many apps that can help with this.

### Limit your use of alcohol and other drugs

While alcohol and other drugs might help you to feel good in the short term, they can make you feel much worse in the longer term.

## What are panic attacks?

Panic attacks can occur as part of any anxiety disorder, but not everyone will experience them. They are sudden rushes of intense anxiety or fear, together with frightening thoughts (e.g., 'I'm going to die', 'I can't breathe') and feelings (e.g., pounding heart, difficulty breathing).

Panic attacks can feel overwhelming, and usually last about 10 minutes. It's important to know these feelings pass.

## Getting support

**There are plenty of ways to manage your anxiety so that it doesn't get in the way of your daily life.**

**Check out the headspace website for tips on how to look after your mental health and to learn more about anxiety.**

If you've tried some of these strategies for some time without improving despite your efforts, it's time to reach out to a trusted friend, family member, Elder, teacher, counsellor, or a health service.



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what is

# post traumatic stress disorder?

**People respond to traumatic events in different ways. Not all people that experience trauma will experience PTSD – this depends on the individual, their past experiences, levels of support and the nature of the event.**

## Is trauma normal?

What happens after traumatic events are normal responses to 'not normal' events. Most people affected by traumatic events are able to learn ways to manage, but additional support may be needed. It's important to remember that there is no 'right' way to respond.

Reaching out for support whenever needed can help make things easier to manage.

## What is a traumatic experience?

A traumatic experience(s) is something that threatens a person's life, safety or the lives of people around them. It's an experience that's stressful and has a significant impact on their emotional state and overwhelms their usual coping skills.

A traumatic experience might be a natural disaster or a personal traumatic event to you or someone else.

Experiencing a trauma might leave someone with questions about safety and control over their life. It can be especially difficult to deal with these feelings if they're also dealing with other changes in their life, like getting a job, managing relationships or moving house.



**Up to 57% of Australians experience trauma at some stage in their lives.**

## What can be the effects of trauma?

It's normal to experience strong emotions after trauma. These can include:

- **emotional numbness and detachment** – feeling cut off from what happened, other people, and yourself
- **shock and disbelief** – that the event happened
- **fear** – of death or injury, being alone, not being able to cope, or the event happening again
- **helplessness** – feeling that you have no control
- **avoidance** – of things that remind you of the event
- **negative thoughts or feelings** – about the world or the reaction to the event
- **guilt or shame** – for not having stopped the event, or for being better off than others, or for not reacting better or coping well enough
- **sadness** – for things that have gone or been lost
- **isolation** – feeling that nobody understands or can help
- **joy** – relief at being alive and safe
- **anger and frustration** – about the event, or the unfairness of it
- **re-experiencing the event** – through dreams, flashbacks or thoughts
- **changes in relationships** – feeling distant from others.

### Other experiences can include:

- headaches
- changes in appetite and weight
- racing heart
- shaking or sweating
- trouble sleeping
- difficulty concentrating
- emotional changes, like mood swings, anxiety, or a quick temper
- difficulty with school or work
- withdrawal from friends and family
- problems keeping up with normal daily activities
- risk-taking, including increased use of alcohol and other drugs
- being overly alert or watchful.

### What is PTSD?

Most people begin to recover from a traumatic experience in the following few weeks. But some people have continuing symptoms of distress, or find that their symptoms are getting worse. This may be PTSD.

### Some of the signs of PTSD include:

- reminders of the traumatic event that are distressing. These could include: dreams, flashbacks, thoughts or memories of the event coming back unexpectedly, physiological reactions that remind you of the event
- avoiding things that remind you of the event. This can include avoiding specific people, places, or events. It can also include efforts to avoid any unwanted memories, thoughts or feelings
- changes to mood and thinking. For example these can include major changes to beliefs about oneself, others or the world, as well as major changes to your emotional state (that gets in the way of living the life you want to live).

### It's important to get help if these changes:

- have been happening for one month or longer
- keep getting worse
- interfere with school, work, your relationships or activities that you enjoy
- cause distress or upset you
- make you think of harming yourself or someone else.

**PTSD can increase the risk of developing other mental health problems such as depression, anxiety or harmful levels of alcohol and other drug use.**

### Looking after yourself

Life can feel chaotic, unsettling and confusing after a traumatic event, so it's important to do things to look after yourself. You can:



get support from people you trust, including your friends, family or teachers by letting them know how you're feeling



get back into your usual routines, like returning to work, school, sports and other hobbies you have



make time for exercise and rest, and for activities that you enjoy



learn some new coping skills



decide what media coverage you can cope with – avoid watching or reading about anything you find upsetting.

When you feel ready, it can be helpful to talk to people about your experiences and try to understand the event.



### Where can I get help?

After experiencing any life trauma, going to talk to someone can be useful in preventing PTSD. There are many general practitioners (GPs) and other health professionals that can help with your recovery. Many of them have worked with young people who have experienced trauma and will be able to help you deal with the stress.

A good place to start might be your local community health centre or headspace centre, or you might want to talk with a trusted friend, teacher or family member about someone they can recommend.

Remember that you won't need to talk about the details of the experience unless you feel completely comfortable and safe.



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# additional support

need to speak with someone urgently or  
check out some resources?

## For immediate support



### Call 000

Call 000 or attend your  
nearest emergency  
department



### Lifeline

13 11 14  
<https://www.lifeline.org.au/>  
24/7 support



### Kids Helpline

1800 55 1800



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