

Recover Adapt Connect

Supporting disaster resilience following bushfire

An initiative of HealthWISE funded by the Australian Government



The following brief article is suitable to include in a parent newsletter.

Recover Adapt Connect | HealthWISE

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II. Ways to assist

How can you provide psychosocial support for children following a frightening or traumatic event such as a natural disaster? Some ideas to consider;

Encourage children to resume their daily activities. This helps to create a feeling of security. This might include returning to school, preschool or day-care. Resume children's relationships with other people such as friends and family. Doing activities with people helps to build feelings of belonging, and will improve the child's self-confidence. Include psychosocial activities that can support recovery into your daily routine.

Daily activities to support a child's psychosocial wellbeing.

Art and drawing can be a way of expressing thoughts and feelings and can be a good way of communicating about how an event or topic can make them feel.

Role play, puppets and drama activities can help a child to express themselves freely and build confidence within themselves. Puppets are great to use with younger children.

Reading, listening to and telling stories can help children to express their feelings and to learn and show empathy towards others. Stories can be used to explore ways to deal with certain situations

Music, singing and dance are another great way of a child being able to express themselves.

Playing games and sports help children to express themselves and to release some energy in a positive way. Structured games and sports can help teach discipline, cooperation and control.

Source: <https://papyrus-project.org/psychosocial-support-for-children-and-young-people/>

Strategies and skills to reduce anxiety

Mindfulness and breathing exercises – these are really important activities that can help children who may be suffering with anxiety or who are triggered by a trauma. Doing these activities can help the child to calm down.

There are so many fantastic mindfulness activities you can do to help children be aware of the present moment and then draw the attention to the positives rather than the negatives.

GEM – Gratitude, Empathy, Mindfulness – ask the children to tell you:

Something they are grateful for from the day?

Something kind they did for someone else?

Something positive they noticed today?

By doing this very simple activity it helps the child to remember and focus on the positive things that have happened in the day, rather than focusing on the negative.



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Try a grounding activity: it helps to calm and distract from anxious thoughts and feelings. A great grounding activity is 5, 4, 3, 2, and 1: Ask the child for;

5 things you can see,

4 things you can touch,

3 things you can hear,

2 things you can smell and

1 thing you can taste?

Butterfly hugs – when children are upset, this bilateral (2-sided) stimulation activity can help to calm things down. Show the child how to give yourself a hug and by crossing over your arms and tapping your arms (like butterfly wings). You may notice the child is tapping their arms quite quickly, but if you do it alongside them you can slow down your taps they will start to copy you and they will start to calm down also. Here is our favourite clip of butterfly hugs: <https://youtu.be/iGGJrqscvtU>

Deep Breathing – breathing plays a very important role in your body's response to stressful situations. There are some really great breathing activities for kids to do, like blowing bubbles with liquid soap, blowing on a pinwheel to make it spin, blowing up a balloon and belly breathing. Here is a great clip from Sesame Street that can help children learn how to belly breathe: <https://youtu.be/oFlKuSCw7ag>

Prepared by the HealthWISE mental health team

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