

Bushfire preparedness for your family



Every year thousands of Australian children and their families are threatened by bushfires. Their homes, schools and communities come under threat. We have all seen on the news and in the media the devastating impact that bushfires can have. Many people think that they won't be affected by a bushfire. But the reality is that if you live near bush land, you need to be prepared for the possibility that a bushfire will come near your home.

Preparing yourself

There are many important things that families can do to prepare themselves for the threat of a bushfire. The first thing you will need to do is to prepare yourself. Being prepared for the threat of a bushfire means being prepared both practically and psychologically. People feel that they are best equipped to deal with a bushfire when they are practically and psychologically prepared.

Being prepared practically means:

- » Getting the things together that you may need to take with you. This could be passports, medicines and photographs. If you have them ready in the one spot, then it will be fast for you to collect them.
- » Preparing your house by making sure that it is free from debris and old leaves.

At the end of this tipsheet you can find other links that can help you to be physically prepared.

Being psychologically prepared means:

- » Knowing about the risks and what you can do – this helps you to deal with disasters more effectively should they occur.
- » Connect with others – this helps in dealing with the threat and also protects people's mental health. This helps adults, children and families get through disasters.
- » Identify your strengths – this can help you to realize what tools or resources you and your family have that can help you get through – these can be thinking, feeling and fear management strategies.
- » Look after your life – don't let preparations for the threat of a bushfire take over your life.

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Talking to your children

Lots of people think that if they talk to their children about the potential threat of a bushfire then they will scare or traumatize their children. In fact, talking to your child openly and honestly, and letting them know that you are prepared and have a plan helps them to feel safer and more secure and will also help them to deal with the impact of the bushfire if it does happen.

The benefits of talking to your children about bushfire preparedness are:

- » Your child is likely to feel more able to deal with the threat and feel safe and secure in knowing that you have a plan.
- » Your child will be able to tell you what is most important for them to take with them in the event of a bushfire.
- » Your child will know that even if they are affected by a bushfire, you and your family will use your resources to work together.

Don't forget the pets

People who have pets often say that they would not leave their pets behind if there was a bushfire, so thinking about what you will do with your animals is an important part of bushfire preparedness.

In the event of a bushfire, most local councils will have somewhere that you will be able to take your animals where they will be safe. Knowing where this is and thinking about how you will get your animals there should be part of your bushfire preparedness plan. Telling your children that you also have a plan in place for their favourite pet will also be reassuring for them.

You may be lucky and never be affected by a bushfire. However, we know that if you are affected, and you are prepared, it is likely that the physical and psychological outcomes for you and your family are likely to be much more positive.

For further information:

Trauma & Grief Network: Supporting Families

www.tgn.anu.edu.au

NSW Rural Fire Service

<http://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au>

Australian Red Cross

<http://www.redcross.org.au/prepare.aspx>

Australian Emergency Management

<http://www.em.gov.au/Pages/default.aspx>

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