

Bushfire season - prepare your mind

The bushfire season is a stressful time for a lot of people. Those in high-risk areas will need to keep alert throughout the summer and monitor conditions in their surrounding area. It is normal to feel anxious during this time of year and this anxiety may be worse for people who have been affected by bushfires in the past.

This fact sheet provides tips to prepare yourself mentally and emotionally for the bushfire season.

How your mind deals with a threat

During a threat or emergency, our bodies are placed in a heightened state of alert. This is a natural response to danger that helps us deal with immediate circumstances.

The heightened state helps us:

- Think clearly
- Plan and make decisions
- Set priorities based on the immediate situation.

While this is a natural response, maintaining this state through a long period, such as the bushfire season, can make our mind and body fatigued and lose efficiency.

Preparing your mind

It is vitally important to prepare yourself before the bushfire season starts and plan your actions to deal with a threat or emergency should one arise. The best way to do this is to prepare a Bushfire Survival Plan. More information on this can be found on the Victorian CFA website at www.cfa.vic.gov.au

Preparing a Bushfire Survival Plan will help you mentally cope throughout the bushfire season as it will help reduce the uncertainty and anxiety around what you and your family will do should a threat arise.

The following tips will help your mind prepare for the bushfire season:

- Develop a plan that suits your household.
- Discuss the plan with all members of the household and make sure they know that staying to defend involves the risk of physical injury and even death.
- Ensure the plan assesses the ability of members of the family to deal with the stress of a fire.

PRACTISE THE PLAN.

Plan to stay informed during a threat or emergency

In the preparation of your Bushfire Survival Plan, it is important to consider how you will receive up-to-date information during a threat or an emergency. Reducing the uncertainty of your situation will help reduce any unnecessary stress.

Consider the following:

- Attend community meetings such as CFA FireReady meetings or Community Fireguard groups so that you are aware of the risk in your area.
- Maintain contact with neighbours and local sources of fire information in the area, especially during high fire-risk days.
- Work out how you're going to receive information during a threat or emergency.

Remember, fire conditions can change quickly, so your plan should not assume that a warning will be received.

A special note about children

It is understandable that you want to keep your family close in a stressful situation, but if you are planning to stay and defend your home during a bushfire, it is strongly advised that children and vulnerable people are well away from any danger area.

There are several reasons for this:

- Children are more vulnerable to stress than adults.
- Although children may appear to cope in a crisis, their reaction to the event may not be evident until a much later time.
- Reactions to crisis can lead to children becoming unable to cope with ordinary problems, suffering sleep problems and nightmares, and having relationship issues with parents, siblings and friends.

When developing your Bushfire Survival Plan, be clear when and how vulnerable people in your household will leave your area.

If your plan is to stay and defend, make sure that your children are being looked after by someone who is well known to them and who they feel safe around. Remain positive and reassuring, and ensure that you plan regular communication with your children to let them know that you are safe.

If at any time you are worried about your mental health or the mental health of a loved one, call Lifeline 13 11 14.



Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Your local community health centre
- Counsellor
- Psychologist
- Lifeline Tel. 13 11 14
- Parentline Tel. 13 22 89
- Kids Helpline Tel. 1800 55 1800
- Nurse-on-Call Tel. 1300 60 60 24 – for expert health information and advice (24 hours, 7 days)
- Australian Psychological Society Referral Service Tel. 1800 333 497
- Victorian Bushfire Support – for multilingual information on protecting your mental health during bushfire season

Things to remember

- The bushfire season may bring back feelings of anxiety.
- Professional help is available if you are unable to cope.
- Stay informed – access to information will help you cope better.

- Preparing a bushfire survival plan will also help you cope better.

This page has been produced in consultation with, and approved by:

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