

Bushfire Season and Anniversary Reactions



The summer season has arrived bringing lots of sunshine but also some very hot days, wild thunderstorms and high winds to some parts of our beautiful country. As we approach the end of a very challenging year, we are especially mindful that these kinds of weather conditions can trigger thoughts of the unprecedented bushfires and associated trauma for so many communities just one year ago.

This first year anniversary offers an important time to:

- **Take note** of, and respond to, our reactions to seasonal triggers (such as high winds, total fire ban days, burning off, smoke)
- **Remember** losses associated with last year's fires
- **Stop and identify** accomplishments
- **Recognise** those who are supporting the recovery process
- **Promote** resilience and healing

It can be helpful to know that it is common to have strong reactions at anniversary times. Recovery takes time, and it requires rebuilding on many levels — physically, emotionally, and spiritually. All in all, anniversaries can be a time when we can do with a little more support as we continue to process the impact on our lives.

How might children and young people react this bushfire season?

Everyone reacts differently and this is OK. Our responses this bushfire season may vary depending on:

- personal losses last year (loved ones, pets, property, precious items)
- what we have experienced since the event
- the level of disruption experienced in our daily lives and on those around us
- the quality of the physical and emotional support we have received, and remains available, from family, community, schools and other support networks
- exposure to disaster-related media from last year

Children and young people can become anxious, upset, withdrawn or angry without realising what the feelings are about. They might also show signs of reluctance to sleep alone, go to school, be apart from parents and worry for the safety of loved ones. Some children and young people may want to participate in public or private memorial or remembrance events but others may prefer to avoid thinking and talking about the event altogether. The way we each respond to change and loss, immediately and over the longer term, can differ a great deal¹.

¹ The above insights have been drawn from the following resources:
<https://theawarenesscentre.com/what-is-the-anniversary-effect/>
https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/dtac/webcast_disaster_anniversaries.pdf
https://earlytraumagrief.anu.edu.au/files/O912010_b%20Tips%20for%20familiesV22%281%29.pdf