



MAKING A BUSHFIRE SURVIVAL PLAN?

*involve your
kids!*



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involve your kids!

If you live in a bushfire prone area, preparing a bushfire survival plan could mean the difference between life and death.

For families with children, bushfire planning presents some special issues and challenges.

As a parent, how much should you tell your child about the family's bushfire survival plan? What role should your child play in the planning process? Will talking to your child about bushfires make them anxious or afraid?

Here are some useful tips based on sound evidence from Bushfire CRC research by Briony Towers, RMIT University. The paintings in this book were produced as part of a school based fire recovery program.

"I am a bit scared of bushfires but I want to know what I would have to do because then I would feel a bit more relaxed."

*Sally,
11 years old,
Macedon*



why

*involve your
children?*



what

*can children
do?*



how

*should I
engage my
children?*



what if



- *our plan is to stay and defend?*
- *we can't leave?*
- *a bushfire happens on a school day?*
- *the school is closed?*



why

what

how

what if

why involve your children?

*Your child can make
a solid contribution
to your bushfire
survival plan.*



While children may find bushfires scary or worrying, research evidence suggests that actively participating in the planning process can help to reduce their fears and concerns. Just like adults, children get worried or scared when they feel they have no control over a particular threat.



Children can make a solid contribution to bushfire survival plans – they are usually highly motivated to participate and they often identify issues or problems that parents overlook.

If you involve your children in the planning process, they will be ready to implement the plan when the need arises. This will make it easier for you to do what needs to be done on the day.

Involving your kids will also ensure that they grow up understanding how to respond to bushfire emergencies – an essential life skill for anyone who lives, works, or travels in bushfire prone areas.



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why

what

how

what if

what can children do?

Children can
get involved in
planning for
bushfire survival.



*From the time they go to school,
there are many ways children can get
involved in bushfire survival planning.*



CHILD-FRIENDLY PLACES

They can help identify child-friendly places to go when you need to leave early (e.g. the homes of friends or relatives in low-risk areas).



PACK A 'FIREBOX'

They can pack a 'firebox' full of their special belongings to take with them when leaving early (e.g. special toys, books, photos, trophies, jewellery). Explain that while you have taken important steps to ensure the safety of the house, it is good to have a box of special things to take with you 'just in case'.

"We've got a firebox in case we have to just get away. You get a cardboard box and put all your really valuable stuff in it, in case your house is burnt".

*Sarah,
9 years old,
Tasmania*



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why

what

how

what if

what can children do?

Children can learn to recite vital information, such as their full name and address, plus emergency contact numbers. !



MAKE A LIST OF THINGS

They can help make a list of things that need to be done before leaving (e.g. closing doors and windows; bringing in door mats; moving combustible items away from the house). Children can also help arrange for the safety of pets and other animals.

LEARN TO RECITE

They can learn to recite their full name and address, the emergency contact numbers (e.g. 000; grandparents, neighbours) and any medical conditions or allergies that they might have. If your family is separated in a bushfire, this information could be vital.

HELP EXPLAIN

Older children can help explain the family's survival plan to younger children – sometimes children understand things more clearly when it is explained by another child. However, be sure to check that the information being passed from child to child is accurate and check their understanding.



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should I engage
my children?

*Communicating with
children about such
a serious topic can
be a bit daunting.*



While there are major advantages to involving your children in your bushfire plan, communicating with them about such a serious topic can be a bit daunting.

Here are some suggestions on how to engage with your children as you involve them in the planning process:



**AS YOU WORK THROUGH
YOUR PLANS WITH YOUR CHILD,
CAREFULLY MONITOR THEIR
EMOTIONAL REACTIONS**

If you notice that they are becoming anxious or upset, ask them how they are feeling, try to find out why they are feeling that way, reassure them that they are safe, and remind them that by planning ahead, the family can avoid being hurt in a bushfire.



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why

what

how

what if

how

should I engage
my children?

Acknowledge that
you sometimes
worry about
bushfires too.



2

MODEL POSITIVE COPING STRATEGIES TO YOUR CHILD

Acknowledge that you sometimes worry about bushfires too, but that by preparing and planning, you feel less afraid because you have more control over your safety.

3

ALWAYS CHECK YOUR CHILD'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE BUSHFIRE PLAN

Children often have misconceptions about bushfires that will influence how they interpret the information you give them. Quiz your child on the different elements of the plan and make sure he/she understands the reasons underlying each particular task or activity.

4

PRACTISE

It is important to practise your plan. Include your children in this process because children learn by doing. With this, they will cope better on the day. It will also help identify the things you need to change or the resources you need to have on hand. Your children can make valuable contributions to this process.



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why

what

how

what if

what if...

A good plan allows
for many different
possibilities. Please
select a question...



our plan is
to stay and
defend?



a bushfire
happens on a
school day?



the school
is closed?



we can't
leave?



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why

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what if...

*A good plan allows
for many different
possibilities.*



*our plan is
to stay and
defend?*



Bushfires can be frightening and extremely dangerous.

If you and the other adult members of your family plan to stay and defend your property, it is advisable to make advanced preparations for your children to leave as early possible on severe, extreme and code red or catastrophic days.

Children are especially vulnerable to the physical and psychological impacts of bushfires. You should take steps to ensure that your children are kept well away from any bushfire threat.

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why

what

how

what if

what if...

A good plan allows for many different possibilities.



While some schools will be closed on code red or catastrophic days, they will still be open on severe and extreme days and dangerous bushfires can happen on these days too.

- Make sure you are familiar with the emergency plans in place at your child's school, kindergarten, or day care. Trying to collect your child once a fire has started could be dangerous, so make sure you are comfortable with the plans that the school has in place.
- Make sure your child is aware of the school's emergency plan. Make sure they understand that you will not be able to pick them up until the fire threat has passed and that this is the safest option for everyone.
- Decide who will collect your child from the school if you are not able to. Ensure that all parties are informed, including the school, and provide your child and the school with the contact details of that person.
- If your child attends a school outside your area, it may not be possible for them to return home, so you need to plan for where they will go and how you will reunite with them after the fire threat has passed.

a bushfire happens on a school day?



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what if...

*A good plan allows
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*the school
is closed?*

Some schools in bushfire areas will be closed on code red or catastrophic days. Leaving children at home unsupervised on these days is extremely dangerous and should be avoided. If you are unable to take time off work, it is important to make advance preparations for your children to be looked after by a trusted adult in a low-risk area.

Remember, that if your family wants to leave early on a severe or extreme fire danger day, and the school is remaining open, you are well within your rights to take your child with you. Just be sure to let the school know and remember to discuss any missed schoolwork with your child's teacher.



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why

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what if...

A good plan allows for many different possibilities.



Every bushfire survival plan should include a backup plan that can be enacted if it is too late to leave. When developing your backup plan, give special thought to how you will ensure you children's safety.

For example, if your backup plan is to stay and defend, what role will your children play in this process and how will you prepare them for this role?

Whatever your backup plan might be, it is essential to think it through well in advance of a bushfire. Make sure that your child knows what will be expected of them. And remember, when it comes to a crisis situation, children take their cues from their parents – if you remain calm and in control, your children will too.



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we can't leave?



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Clothing

checklist for
the kids



a long-sleeved
shirt and pants
made of
natural
fibre

leather boots
or shoes and
woollen socks



a wide
brimmed
hat



***As part of your back up plan, put together
a store of protective clothing for each of
your children. They will need:***

a cotton
scarf to filter
the smoke



goggles or
sunglasses to
protect the
eyes



*Be sure to update the kit each year,
so that footwear and clothing are the right size.*



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***For more information
on how to prepare your
bushfire survival plan:***

- *Go to your state fire agency website – most agencies have prepared lots of helpful information.*
- *Search online for Prepare. Act. Survive.*

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