



TIP SHEET #4

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Bushfire is particularly overwhelming

In bushfires the immediacy of the threat is just overwhelming - in a way that doesn't happen with many other natural disasters.

The risk of being killed, in the bushfire front, is extraordinarily high.

Of all the natural disasters, this is the one with the greatest sensory overload. For example:

- The smoke obstructs any vision.
- The embers burn the eyes and skin.
- The noise of incinerating trees and bushland is deafening.
- The smoke hampers breathing.

There is this terrible isolation.

In floods people get a little warning. Earthquakes can be somewhat similar. But the nature of fire is particularly overwhelming.

"People expect to be distressed. They expect to have a sense of loss"

Recognise long term needs

Parents mediate the impact of a natural disaster in the lives of their children. So, helping parents is one of the critical issues post-disaster.

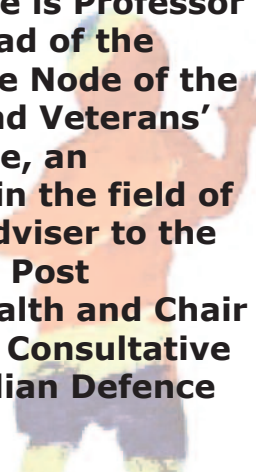
Teachers, health professionals and family help translate and give meaning to the events that children and adolescents don't grasp.

There is a 'cumulative risk model' in place where, the greater the number of traumatic events in a person's life, the increased risk of posttraumatic health issues.

Traumatic experiences are common.

Communities affected by bushfire are just like any other day-to-day community in Australia.

The Australian Mental Health & Wellbeing Survey, published at the end of 2008, found that 20% of the population has a mental health disorder at any particular point in time.



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You don't have to do something now

The most important issue for health and welfare professionals, in the one to three months after a natural disaster, is to not presume that something has to be done now.

People have their own ways of coping and managing in these situations. We shouldn't presume that everyone is going to need professional assistance.

Following the Ash Wednesday bushfires, people requested psychological help, not in the first twelve months, but after the second year.