



Supporting your employees affected by bushfires – after six months

After six to 12 months

Your employees may have experienced significant challenges after the bushfires. It is important to be aware that some of them who were impacted by the bushfires may **still be experiencing symptoms of distress and may be affected to varying degrees, even after six months.**

Recovery in the first year

Your employees may continue to experience varying degrees of distress before they recover.

Most individuals who have been experiencing symptoms of distress following the bushfires will have begun to recover. Some individuals are likely to continue to experience mild to moderate symptoms.

A small number of individuals may experience significant distress over several years following the bushfires.

It is important to demonstrate empathy, support and connection when communicating with employees.

Individuals who feel isolated and/or forgotten after the bushfires are more likely to express greater distress.

Ways you can support your employees

- Actively check in with employees
 - How they are going?
 - Do they have any concerns for their colleagues?
- Be aware and check in with those who are on leave/not at work when they are meant to be
- Avoid making judgments or assumptions about those who were affected by the bushfires, or continue to be impacted
- Use open and honest communication
- Provide practical and emotional support
 - Employee Assistance Program (EAP)
 - External support services
 - Information
 - Encourage support from colleagues
- Encourage stress management strategies and healthy coping behaviours within the workplace and home
 - Self-care: sleep, exercise, healthy and nutritious diet
 - Social support and connection
 - Recovery skills, including taking time for enjoyable activities, positive thinking and problem solving
 - Reduce symptoms of stress with relaxation techniques (e.g. breathing, meditation, journalling)

- Provide a sense of structure and predictability within the workplace
- Provide flexible working arrangements, where possible, to allow employees to deal with outside issues
- Be aware of the possible ongoing issues being faced by your employees
 - Stressors e.g. financial, housing
 - Symptoms or distress
 - Injury or illness
 - Disruptions of relationships.

Common responses to the bushfires may include:

- Thoughts about the bushfires, including dreams or nightmares, flashbacks, replaying the events, thoughts or memories
- Difficulties concentrating or remembering things
- Fear and anxiety
- Feeling a lack of involvement or enjoyment in activities
- Feeling depressed or low mood
- Anger or irritability
- Feeling a sense of emptiness or hopelessness
- Being overprotective of family/friends' safety
- Feeling on edge or very alert and easily startled
- Sleeping difficulties
- Increased conflict with family/friends
- Tearfulness
- Replaying events and questioning different outcomes ("what if...").

While these are common responses to disaster events, professional help should be sought if symptoms become too distressing or impact daily life.

Warning signs to look out for

- Feelings of guilt or shame
- Irritability or emotional outbursts
- Unusual worry, distractedness or anxiety
- Lack of concentration or unusual memory lapses
- Unexplained or excessive work absences
- Uncharacteristically poor or inconsistent work performance
- Withdrawn behaviour
- Active avoidance of work responsibilities
- Substance abuse or self-medicating
- Reckless, dangerous or risky behaviours.

Monitor your employees' behaviours and encourage those displaying these behaviours to seek help.

Be mindful of the potential ongoing impacts for employees when assigning tasks.

Keep in mind the need for

- Simple and clear instructions
- Additional safety precautions
- Active check-ins
- Provision of ongoing support.

Service Contacts



icare employer and business owner policy enquiries

13 44 22

GPs and other healthcare professionals

Make an appointment with your doctor, in-person or via telehealth

Disaster Welfare Assistance Line

1800 018 444

NSW Mental Health Line

1800 011 511

Lifeline

13 11 14

Beyond Blue

1300 224 636

APM Community Support Line

1800 276 113 for free telephone counselling

Australian Association of Psychologists Inc. - free SMS counselling services

Text 0488 807 266

Healthy Minds

1300 160 339 for free face-to-face or telephone counselling

Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement - Counselling and Support Service

1300 664 786 or 03 9265 2111