

Supporting staff through the bushfire crisis



The impact of recent Victorian Bushfires is being felt across Australia and will continue to be experienced well into the future.

Slowly, people are coming to terms with these tragic events; the immediate shock has passed and the enormity of the task of rebuilding lives, homes and families is becoming clear. The road to recovery will take time and will be different for each person and organisation involved.

Caraniche have been working with the Department of Human Services to support workers providing direct support to the affected families.

We have also been supporting many other organisations whose staff are feeling the effects of this crisis. Workplaces and staff teams across Victoria are being affected in different ways, both directly and indirectly.

Your staff may have been directly affected through:

- loss of home, family, community or friends
- concerns about friends, family and workmates
- loss of control and a sense of safety
- seeing, hearing or smelling the fire or its effects
- “survivor guilt”

Your staff may be indirectly affected because of:

- the scale of the loss of life
- the intense media coverage
- the event has triggered thoughts & feelings of other distressing events or losses
- anger & disbelief about the event
- wanting to assist, but feeling inadequate

It can be difficult to provide effective support if you are also overwhelmed.

Model healthy behaviours by taking care of yourself and having time out. Trying to maintain as close as possible a routine as possible can balance the highs and lows of this crisis.

Signs that people might need support:

Everybody reacts differently in times of stress, some common reactions during a crisis are:

- Feeling anxious or worried
- Being more emotional than usual
- Disrupted sleeping, eating & social contact
- Feeling flat or sad
- Not being able to talk or think about anything else
- Feeling helpless
- Being unable to concentrate or focus

What you can do to provide support

- Acknowledge their distress
- Allow them to talk
- Recognise that their reaction is normal in the circumstances
- Give them space if they require it
- Encourage them to maintain their usual social supports
- Provide information on the help and support available
- Provide information on practical strategies for recovery
- Coffee, tea, soft drinks, cigarettes and alcohol after critical incidents may increase arousal and impede people’s ability to speedily recover
- A combination of individual and group interventions is most effective, even when the incident appears to have primarily affected one person

*for more information, assistance or advice on supporting your staff, contact Caraniche free call 24/7: 1800 099 444
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