

# flamxiety

## TALKING WITH KIDS ABOUT THE PORT HILLS FIRE

### COMMON REACTIONS

- Feeling anxious, worried and afraid about themselves, other people and pets. They may be more worried about being separated from you or become more 'clingy'.
- Fears about the fire spreading, or more fires starting.
- Distressed at reminders of the fire e.g. sirens, helicopter sounds, smoke smell or seeing burnt landscape.
- Behaviour changes: increased activity or restlessness, decreased concentration and attention, irritability, withdrawal, aggression or angry outburst, regression e.g. bedwetting, tantrums, baby talking
- Complaining of physical pain e.g. headaches, stomachaches, general aches and pains.
- Change in sleep and appetite. Bedtime may be especially challenging.
- Disinterest in their usual activities, including socialising

### HOW CAN YOU HELP?

- **Role Model:** kids are watching their grown-ups for clues on how to respond. Modelling calm behaviours, and using a calm voice will help them to feel safer and respond well.
- **Routines:** stick with family rules, mealtimes, bedtimes etc. as you can
- **Talk time:** having questions and expressing concerns is okay. The situation changes constantly, so questions and concerns may repeat or change. Remain flexible and open to answering repeated questions and clarifying information for them. A good conversation starter could be: "You must have lots of questions about the fire. I'd love to hear them. Let's sit down and have a talk about it."
- **Be honest** and also ask for their opinions and ideas. This is a good way to uncover misinformation. It's okay to say you don't know the answer, but if you find out you'll let them know.
- **Validate:** it is normal to feel whatever they are feeling, so try to avoid saying things like "Don't worry" or "There's nothing to be scared about". You could try: "I can understand why you feel like that/have that question."
- **Reassurance:** Talk about your family's safety plan for if there is a fire, or if you need to evacuate. You could even do a fire evacuation drill.
- **Gratitude:** One of the best counters to fear is gratitude. Talk about the helpers - firefighters, Civil Defence, Red Cross. Write a letter to a helper, or make a visit to a fire station and thank them for their help. Keep things as hopeful as you can.
- **Encourage helping:** Children (and adults) cope best when there is something they can DO. Give appropriate tasks and follow up with a fun family activity, like a game.
- **Monitor adult conversations:** including media exposure. Kids may misinterpret information and become frightened unnecessarily, or become distressed by photos or video footage.
- **Take care of yourself too**

*"Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping."*  
Mr Rogers