

## APPTA Response to the Australian Bushfires

At this time it is understandable that many members may wish to support children and their families who are impacted by the bushfires across multiple states and territories of Australia. As you are aware the coordinated first responders have already activated and sequenced their delivery and provision of resources for meeting the essential activities of daily living. APPTA advises that if members wish to donate financial aid that they contribute to a recognised charity or organisation, furthermore if APPTA members are calling for donations, that they do so in conjunction with a recognised charity or organisation. Examples could include The Salvation Army, SES, Red Cross and WIRES.

It is important to consider your individual scope of practice and base any support on current research on post disaster service delivery. Table 1 extends on “Postdisaster roles for Mental Health Professionals, and Questions for Determining Roles:” (VanFleet & Mochi, 2015, p.177)

Table 1

### *Reflexivity when considering post-disaster play therapy roles*

	<b>Post-Disaster Roles for Play Therapists</b>	<b>Self-Reflective Considerations</b>
1	Identify the post-disaster services and organisations in your local area.	How can play therapy complement the organisations post-disaster response?
2	Coordinate with charities, organisations and government agencies.	Consider what is in your scope of practice that you may offer?
3	Provide assistance with activities of daily living.	What is required now and what therapeutic recreational activities may support the community?
4	Triage needs based on a sound assessment.	What needs to be prioritised now and for future support?
5	Assist in the planning and delivery of playful activities.	How can you plan for systemic longevity and sustainability?
6	Offer consultation for establishing creative play resources to meet the needs of the community.	Consider developmentally and culturally sensitive toys and play resources for therapeutic activities?
7	Offer training and supervision to local personnel with consideration to their scope of practice.	What expertise do you bring from your primary discipline as well as Play Therapy and Filial Therapy training?
8	When assessed as appropriate deliver therapeutic interventions for children through families and significant others within the community.	How would you consider and scaffold therapeutic interventions within a systemic framework?

Adapted from VanFleet & Mochi (2015)

Table 2 outlines the scaffolded and carefully sequenced responses as to what play therapists could provide when during the timeline for community recovery. This table was adapted and extended from “Three levels of post disaster intervention” (VanFleet & Mochi, 2015, p.180).

Table 2

*Therapeutic scaffolding post-disaster*

Level of therapeutic response	Type of therapeutic activity and intervention	Desired focus of activity and intervention
Normative activities	Culturally appropriate, playful, inclusive, games, sports and other social activities. These activities can be facilitated by the therapeutic practitioner or led by children and families in conjunction with the community members, organisational staff and the practitioner.	<p>To provide a sense of normality through socially engaging playful and fun activities.</p> <p>This provides a platform for the organisation and practitioner to build and strengthen community relationships and identify needs.</p> <p>Ensuring safety within the environment may enable tensions to be released.</p> <p>It is through these actions that a trusting relationship may be strengthened.</p>
Therapeutic activities	<p>Developmentally and culturally sensitive social activities with clear linkage to identified needs.</p> <p>Activities should be planned and recorded using clinical documentation.</p>	To alleviate stress, develop skills and coping strategies, provide opportunities for problem solving, build resilience, further develop relationships and engage in ongoing assessment of needs.
Play therapy	<p>The timing of service delivery of individual, family or systemic interventions should be planned based on clinically informed post-disaster best practice.</p> <p>Adhere to APPTAs <a href="#">Clinical Competencies and Practice Standards</a> (2014).</p>	<p>To provide play therapy interventions for children, family and communities to support the social and emotional wellbeing and healing post-disaster.</p> <p>To offer ongoing assessment and progress referrals for</p>

	<p>Provision of Play Therapy in accordance with practitioner’s level of training and expertise.</p> <p>Interventions may include humanistic, directive, group, family, and systemic models of play therapy practice.</p>	<p>additional service provision when needed.</p> <p>To advocate for children to support family and community cohesion.</p>
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**Play therapy recommended readings**

Mochi, C., & VanFleet, R. (2009). Roles play therapists play: Post-disaster engagement and empowerment of survivors. *Play Therapy, 4*(4), 16–18. [Link to article](#)

Shenandoah Valley Project Impact (2017). *Disaster Activity Book for Kids*. [Link to article](#)

VanFleet, R., & Mochi, C. (2015). In S. Goldstein, R.B. Brooks, & D. A. Crenshaw (Eds.) *Play Therapy Interventions to Enhance Resilience* (pp. 168-193). New York: The Guilford Press.

**Professional Development**

[APS practice certificate in disaster support course A: Disasters in context](#)

**Useful resources**

[Bushfires and mental health](#)

[Impact of natural disasters on mental health](#)

[Community Trauma Toolkit](#)

[Psychological First Aid: An Australian guide to supporting people affected by disaster](#)

[Psychological First Aid An Australian guide to supporting people affected by disaster](#)

[Bushfires response: Resource pack for educators](#)

[How to talk to your kids about out-of-control fires](#)

[Information for parents and carers looking after children who have been affected by bushfires](#)

[Trauma and children – tips for parents](#)

[International Society for Traumatic Stress Studies](#)

[How can parents help children cope with the stress of the bushfires?](#)

[Babies and toddlers might not know there’s a fire but disasters still take their toll](#)

**Therapeutic referrals**

Contact an APPTA play therapist in your area using the “find a play therapist” on the APPTA website [here](#)