



# Need to Play

A BeCentre Initiative

Every child in Australia has been impacted by the recent bushfires in some way. Some may have lost loved ones, their homes, their animals or their schools. Some have friends who have experienced these losses. Others may just be frightened by what they have heard or seen on TV.

How can you support your child to help them cope during difficult times?

They need to play!



## The Power of Play

- For children, play is one of the most important aspects of their lives as it is central to their physical, mental, social and emotional health.
- By playing, children learn by doing; they explore and experience the world around them; experiment with new ideas and roles and in doing so start to understand the world they live in.
- Play is instinctive and it can tap into deep emotions, allowing greater understanding and insight.
- Children sometimes don't have the words to express how they feel. When your child has faced a difficult experience or a traumatic event, it is important to let them play it out if they choose to. For example, your child may start drawing or acting out scenes related to the traumatic events. Allow them to do this.
- By playing it out your child is safely expressing feelings such as fear, confusion, sadness and anger. Play can literally rewire the brain and help your child heal, manage stress and build resilience.

Processing what's happened is an important part of recovery from natural disasters, especially for our children. So get out your paints or pencils or play doh and let them play out what they've been through.

## Need to Play

Aside from encouraging your child to play and be creative and curious, whenever you can, play with your child! You don't need commercial toys. Encourage your child to use the resources around them. Sometimes the simplest thing can free a child to use their imagination and spark their creativity. We've listed some easy ideas below.

Remember to:

- Get down to your child's level – this helps you to be in tune with them.
- Remove all distractions (e.g. mobiles) and focus on your child.
- Allow your child to lead the play - pretend they are the director of the play and you are the actor (although you'll always oversee safety).
- When your child expresses their feelings, try to name those feelings for example, "You seem really angry about that" or "You're feeling sad about that".

Great Play  
Ideas you can  
do with your  
child

- **Nature** – Be inspired from nature - sticks, sand/earth, shells, rocks, pebbles and water can trigger your child's creativity (e.g. instigate a treasure hunt, create a nature collage or a rock painting).
- **Recyclable objects** – Normal recyclable items such as cardboard boxes, string and plastic containers are excellent for creative building (e.g. houses, cars, trains or a rocket ship). Children love collecting 'treasure' to use in this type of Play.
- **Each other** – Children also love nurturing and connecting activities, particularly if it involves the senses (e.g. finger 'drawing' on each other's back, rubbing lotion on each other's hands, singing or dancing together to a favourite song). This connection to the senses can help children regulate and reduce anxiety.
- **Bubbles** – Bubbles can be used for exciting play (e.g. chasing and capturing the bubbles) but they are also ideal when children need soothing or calmness (e.g. lying on the floor and letting the bubbles gently land on them).
- **Corn Flour and Water** – Messy play is a style of play which allows children to explore their senses. An easy example of messy play is placing cornflour in a container and allowing your child to gradually add water. Your child can use their fingers to start to explore the changing texture (powdery, hard, crumbly, slimy etc).
- **Arts & Crafts** – If you can, provide a range of materials, natural resources and textures. Simply sitting next to your child whilst they draw, paint or create with craft or creating an artwork together can support your child to share their thoughts, feelings or what's meaningful to them.
- **Story time** – Reading or telling a story to your child is a lovely way to connect with them whilst fostering creativity and imagination. Perhaps take turns reading each page or act out the story together to keep things interesting.

If you feel your child is not coping and needs professional help, Play Therapy is an age appropriate and safe form of counseling for children which uses the child's natural language of communicating through play.

For more information about Play  
Therapy contact Be Centre:

Be Centre is a self funded charity that provides one-to-one Play Therapy for children aged 3-12 years. We are dedicated to early intervention, stopping cycles of harm and helping children heal from trauma and difficult life challenges so they can thrive.

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