

Play School

Early Education Notes

Series: Everyday Helpers

Background

From the Fire and Rescue Services to paramedics and the SES, our 'Everyday Helpers' play a vital role in ensuring community safety and care. In this empowering new series, Play School team up with Australian Red Cross and The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR). With the help of some very special guests from the emergency services, we share early childhood safety messages relevant in times of emergency. Through imaginary play, stories and song, Play School explore ways children can maintain a sense of agency, even during very challenging times.

Why is Play School addressing emergencies?

Emergencies are part of life and can be scary and confusing experiences for all of us – including our youngest citizens. It is important to talk about emergencies with children to help them make sense of what's happening and cope before, during and after an emergency.

Through listening to young children and responding to their questions in an honest and age-appropriate way, adults can help them to make sense of sudden and unfamiliar experiences and provide reassurance for the future.

By providing young children with reliable information about emergencies, people who can help and some simple actions that they can take themselves, adults can support children's sense of agency, reduce anxiety, minimise harm and keep children safe and calm during emergencies.



Who are the Play School Everyday Helpers?

Episode 1 – Firefighters

Emma & Teo meet Kate & Peter, two fire fighters! We learn about the practice of cultural burning, and fire fighters, Kiya & Jemima rescue Humpty off a wall! *Through The Windows* we see more fire fighters in an animation.

- Educators wishing to learn more about cultural burning can visit [ABC Education](#) and view a segment taken from ABC series 'Big Weather'. ABC Education have associated resources for teachers - suitable for students in Year 4 and above.
- For more helpful early learning resources visit Brigade Kids; [prior to school](#), [Early Stage 1](#) and [older school grades](#).



Episode 2 – Police

Emma & Kaeng meet Sara, a police officer with a bicycle! They inspect Sara's bicycle with Constable Maurice, and there's an exciting police rescue mission! *Through The Windows* we see more police officers in an animation.

- Check out the NSW Police '[School Safe – Keeping Me Safe](#)' pdf resource booklet (relevant for children in Kindergarten +). Useful messaging and application in all states and territories.



Episode 5 – Australian Red Cross volunteers

Zindzi & Teo meet Reem, a volunteer for the Australian Red Cross! We see some of the ways that volunteers help people recover after an emergency, and how we can help too. Teo & Zindzi put on a concert for the toys and *Through The Windows* we see more volunteers in an animation.

Follow up reflection: The ability to empathise is a gradual process that stems from strong attachments, development of self-awareness and by encouraging children to identify their feelings and the feelings of others. After watching this episode, invite children to talk about a time when they helped a friend or family member. Relate to everyday activities such as helping a loved one to move to a new house, making and delivering meals when a new baby arrives or helping at a community event. Encourage children to share how helping someone made them feel. How do they think the other person felt when somebody was kind to them? Why?



Links to the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)

Whether it's a visit to the emergency room or recovering from a bushfire – the play-based emergency scenarios incorporated in this series are relevant to many to children and families living in Australia. Everyday Helpers is valuable opportunity for co-viewing in the home, or in early learning settings. Learning about emergencies supports a variety of EYLF Outcomes.

Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity.

1.1 - Children feel safe, secure, and supported.

1.2 - Children develop their emerging autonomy, inter-dependence, resilience and sense of agency.

Outcome 2: Children are connected with and contribute to their world.

2.1 - Children develop a sense of belonging to groups and communities and an understanding of the reciprocal rights and responsibilities necessary for active community participation.

Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of wellbeing.

3.1 - Children become strong in their social and emotional wellbeing.

Episode 3 – Nurses and Doctors

Abi & Luke meet Ben, a friendly and helpful nurse! Luke uses craft materials to make his own stethoscope, and Jemima visits Dr Kiya at hospital for an x-ray! *Through The Windows* we see more medical workers in an animation.

- Suggested story books to alleviate worry and answer questions about going to the doctor / hospital:
 - * 'Daniel Visits the Doctor' (2014) by Becky Friedman and Jason Fruchter (illus). (Adapted from the television series Daniel Tiger's Neighborhood).
 - * 'Usborne First Experiences - Going to the Doctor' (2005) By Anna Civardi and Stephen Cartwright (illus).
 - * 'Noah's Garden' (2010) by Mo Johnson and Anabelle Josse (illus). NB: This is a lovely book for young families dealing with hospital stays.



Episode 4 – State Emergency Services (SES)

Abi & Matt meet Mara, a volunteer from the State Emergency Service! We learn about the SES uniform and equipment, and SES worker, Dan, helps the toys after a big storm. *Through The Windows* we see more SES workers in an animation.

- Contact the relevant State Emergency Service in your state or territory to access any available early education resources.



What are some of the most common childhood reactions during and after an emergency?

Infants and young children react in a variety of ways during and after an emergency. Some common reactions include:

- returning to early behaviours like thumb-sucking, bedwetting, or fear of the dark
- forgetting new skills, manners or expectations
- difficulty sleeping or night terrors
- changes to eating patterns and dietary habits
- separation difficulties and not wanting to be alone
- being easily startled, hyperalert or hyperactive
- feeling unsafe or fearful, crying or other appearances of distress.

Suggested Resources

[Australian Red Cross booklet](#): Helping children and young people cope with crisis - Information for parents and caregivers.

Emerging Minds: What parents and caregivers can expect after a disaster or community trauma – [during and immediately after](#), [in the short term](#) and [in the long term](#).

How can adults best support children during these times?

- listen to what they have to say, answer their questions
- be honest and provide information from reliable sources
- reassure them about the future
- involve children in activities and tasks as soon as they can cope
- try to keep a normal routine

- encourage play and fun
- allow emotions to be shared and practice coping strategies
- thank and praise children when appropriate
- assure children the event is not/was not their fault.

Suggested Resources

Australian Red Cross – [Resources for children and parents](#).

Emerging Minds – [Resources for Parents and Carers from the Community Trauma Toolkit](#).



Sharing stories about emergencies

Either before, during or after an emergency fear or worry can be alleviated by sharing developmentally appropriate messages that are truthful yet reassuring. Storytelling and associated picture talks can be one way to do this. Here are some helpful books:

- [‘Birdie’s Tree stories’](#) (2020) Children’s Health Queensland.
- ‘Grug and the Bushfire’ (2020) By Ted Prior.
- [‘Fire Wombat’](#) (2020) by Australian Children’s Laureate, Jackie French. [Classroom Resources](#) by Barbara Braxton are available to accompany ‘Fire Wombat’.
- [The Natural Disaster Picture Books](#) by Jackie French and Bruce Whatley. Recommended for primary school aged children.
- ‘Tippy and Jellybean - The True Story of a Brave Koala who Saved her Baby from a Bushfire’ (2020) By Sophie Cunningham.
- [The Disaster Book Series](#) by COPE. Created by UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR).
- ‘Sometimes I Feel Like a Mouse – A Book About Feelings’ (1996) By Jeanne Modesitt.



Resources for early primary school teachers

- Red Cross' [Get Ready resource to help children prepare for emergencies](#). (Ages 5-8).
- [Resources for lower primary](#) at the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR):
- [L'il Larrikins Bushfire Series](#) on AIDR YouTube.
- [L'il Larrikins Natural Hazard Series](#) on AIDR YouTube.
- [Survive and Thrive](#), a bushfire message from Strathewen Primary School on YouTube.
- If you are working with young students to learn about hazards and emergencies and ways to stay safe, you might be interested in submitting an entry to the [Resilient Australia Awards](#).

Other reading and resources for families and Early Childhood Educators

- [Birdie's Tree: Additional resources](#) from Children's Health Queensland
- The Sesame Street [Big Feelings](#) video is about being scared after an emergency. (Ages 3-5)
- Emerging Minds: [How parents and caregivers can prepare for a natural disaster](#).
- [RediPlan](#): Red Cross' emergency plan
- [Involving your kids in bushfire survival planning](#), Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre.
- Kids Listen article: [How to Prepare Kids for Emergencies](#).
- ABC Kids Early Education video: [How to Talk to Kids About Emergencies](#) – with child psychologist, Nicola Palfrey.
- ABC Kids Early Education Educator Reflection: [How to help children deal with trauma and grief after bushfire crisis](#) – with child psychologist Nicola Palfrey.



How you can be an everyday helper

- Volunteer with a local community group or not-for-profit organisation in your area.
- Prepare for an emergency with your family using [RediPlan](#).
- Early education and care providers can reach out to local emergency services. Invite them to visit your centre and speak to children about emergencies and helpers in the local area.
- If you're a parent or carer, ask your child's early education and care setting if they are planning to have local emergency services visit.



Credits

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Early Education Notes

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