



# CHARLIE'S BIRTHDAY ADVENTURE



A STORY ABOUT FEELING SAFE  
IN EMERGENCIES

WRITTEN BY MICHELLE HAMROSI  
ILLUSTRATED BY COURTENAY TOOTH



THIS BOOK  
BELONGS TO

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The Australian Breastfeeding Association Eurobodalla Group,  
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Dedicated to the many helpers  
who work together to keep us safe in  
emergencies.

For our children, wild,  
brave and kind.

And in memory of Badger – our  
ball-chasing friend.



Hi, I'm Charlie!  
I just turned 5.  
This is my baby sister Lily.





I want to tell you about my  
birthday adventure.  
It turned out very different  
from what I expected.



The day before my birthday, Mummy and  
Daddy were busy packing.  
'We need to go away for a day or two on an  
adventure', Daddy said.





Daddy asked, 'What special things  
would you like to take with you?'.

I thought very hard.  
'My teddy and blankie ... and  
maybe my blocks and a book!'





On my birthday, Mummy woke me quickly.  
'It's time to leave on our adventure, Charlie.'  
Can you put your special things in your backpack?  
I grabbed my things and Lily's rattle, so she wouldn't miss out.

Can you spot how  
many times Charlie's  
teddy and Lily's rattle  
appear in the story?





‘Great work, Charlie’, Daddy said as we loaded the car.  
I felt proud that I could help.



Outside, the sky was orange and the air smelled strange.  
I started to wonder what was happening.  
I asked Mummy, 'Where are we going?'.

'To a busy place called a shelter',  
Mummy explained.  
'You might see some friends there.  
But first we need to stop  
at our neighbour's'.





‘But why are we leaving?’ I asked.  
Mummy replied gently: ‘There is a  
bushfire. But we are driving away  
from it. Together, we’ll be safe’.



We stopped at our neighbour Anji's. She grows sunflowers and has puppies. I met Sooty, a puppy with black ears and a white nose.

We helped Anji pack her dogs, along with their food and blankets.





Then Daddy said,  
'It's time to keep going'.







At the shelter, there were people, dogs, cats,  
even chickens! It was noisy and busy.

I hugged Teddy tight.  
Daddy said, 'Let's stay close together'.

Helpers in bright vests gave us  
water and sandwiches.

What helps you feel  
calm in a busy place?



Guess what? I found my best friend, Alex!

We played with the puppies  
and built a whole city  
with our blocks.

I almost forgot it was  
my birthday, until ...





# SURPRISE!

Mummy grinned and handed  
me a cupcake.

Everyone sang 'Happy Birthday'.  
I felt warm and happy inside.





What helps you  
feel safe when  
sleeping  
somewhere new?

That night was hot and noisy. Lily cried a lot and Mummy fed her. I felt a bit scared and Daddy rubbed my back. 'Snuggle with your blankie and Teddy', he whispered. I felt calmer and soon fell asleep.



In the morning, I felt hungry and mixed up.  
Daddy gave me a banana and some sultanas.  
'Charlie', Mummy smiled: 'we'll be heading home soon.  
Go and say goodbye to Alex'.



When we got home, everything was messy.  
'Let's help each other clean up', Daddy said.





We swept, washed and helped our neighbours too.  
People in bright clothes helped with the big jobs.



Can you spot all  
the different  
helpers in this  
story?

A few days later, we finally had my party.  
Anji brought me bright sunflowers.

I blew out five candles and  
made a wish – for a puppy.





‘Surprise!’, said Anji, handing me Sooty.  
My heart burst with happiness.  
My wish came true!

Even though my birthday  
was different, it really was a  
big adventure!



# LET'S GO ON AN ADVENTURE

Sometimes, when there's a bushfire, families need to leave home for a while to stay safe. Making a plan, just like Charlie's parents, helps everyone know what to do and what to bring, so you can feel cared for and calm.

## Feelings



- How would you feel if you had a birthday adventure like Charlie's?
- Imagine you're in a new or busy place – what would help you feel calm and safe?

## Adventure bag



- If you had to leave home and go somewhere safe for a few days, what special things would you take with you?
- What would you pack for your brother, sister, or a friend?



## Family adventure plan



- If your family had to leave home, where could you go on your adventure?
- Think about staying with family or friends, or finding another safe place away from home like the shelter.
- Like Charlie's neighbour Anji, is there someone you would check in on or help along the way?

## Adventure pals



- Do you have a pet?
- What special things would they need if they came with you on your adventure?



USE THIS SPACE TO WRITE OR DRAW YOUR OWN ADVENTURE PLAN

FOR MORE ACTIVITIES  
AND WORKSHEETS,  
VISIT OUR WEBSITE  
THROUGH THE  
QR CODE



## PREPARING TOGETHER: A GUIDE FOR PARENTS + CAREGIVERS

Disasters like bushfires can be frightening, especially for young children. Preparing together helps children feel calm and safe, and reduces stress for everyone.

*Charlie's Birthday Adventure* was inspired by real families in the research undertaken by the Australian Breastfeeding Association and Western Sydney University, the 'Babies and Young Children in the Black Summer study'.

Parents reported:

- 'we wish we'd left earlier'.
- 'we should have packed an evacuation kit and had a plan ready'.

### Family emergency plan

- ☐ Plan to leave early.
- ☐ Pack an adventure bag (your evacuation kit for you and your children).
- ☐ Encourage your children to pack their special toys, just like Charlie did.
- ☐ Decide where you'll go (friends, family, shelter) and how you'll get there.
- ☐ Work out who you will contact to tell them you are leaving and that you have arrived safely.
- ☐ Have a backup plan. Identify other options for transport and safe places to shelter.

### Supporting children in emergencies

Children can react in different ways during and after an emergency. They may:

- be clingy, upset, quiet or 'mixed up'.
- go backwards in skills for a while (bed wetting, sleep issues, needing closeness).



### Ways to help

- **If scared:** hold them close, speak calmly and gently.
- **If confused:** give clear, simple instructions and stay together.
- **For comfort:** encourage snuggles, quiet play and small routines, like bedtime stories.
- **Offer choices:** letting them pick a toy or snack restores a sense of control.
- **Encourage expression:** children may show feelings through play or drawing – this helps them process feelings.
- **Limit scary news:** repeated images or overheard worries can increase anxiety.
- **Model calm coping:** children take their lead from you. Even if you're worried, showing steadiness reassures them.

### Talk together

Just like Charlie's family, use simple words so children feel prepared, not scared. You might say: 'We're packing and going somewhere safe'. Framing it as an adventure can make it feel less worrying. For older kids, you could add, 'There is a bushfire, but we're driving away from it. Together, we'll be safe'.

- Remind them helpers are working hard to keep everyone safe.
- Let them know it's okay to feel worried, sad or angry. Charlie felt worried until Mummy explained what was happening. A calm explanation, repeated when needed, helps children feel safe and supported.



### When to seek extra support

If your child's distress:

- lasts more than a few weeks
- affects sleep, eating, or separation
- impacts play, school, or friendships
- is affecting how they are coping.

# HELPFUL RESOURCES FOR GROWN UPS

## Pregnancy, babies and children



### *Australian Breastfeeding Association*

Practical checklists for babies and toddlers, planning guides and information on safe feeding, sleep and more.

🔗 [aba.asn.au/emergency](http://aba.asn.au/emergency)



### *Disaster Preparation and Recovery - a family guide*

A practical family guide covering pregnancy, preparing with children, supporting children with additional needs, recovery and more.

🔗 [raisingchildren.net.au/guides/disasters](http://raisingchildren.net.au/guides/disasters)

### *Australian Red Cross – RediPlan*

Free household plan to help you prepare, respond and recover from emergencies.

🔗 [redcross.org.au/prepare](http://redcross.org.au/prepare)

## Preparedness for pets

### *Prepare Your Pets for Disasters*

Tips and checklists to keep your pets safe in emergencies.

🔗 [ready.gov/pets](http://ready.gov/pets)





## Emergency Services & Support – Australia Wide

In immediate danger, always call Triple Zero – 000

Find Your State or Territory Fire Service

| State/<br>Territory | Bushfire Service                               | Info Line    | Website                                                     |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| NSW                 | NSW Rural Fire Service                         | 1800 679 737 | <a href="https://rfs.nsw.gov.au">rfs.nsw.gov.au</a>         |
| ACT                 | ACT Emergency Services Agency                  | 13 22 81     | <a href="https://esa.act.gov.au">esa.act.gov.au</a>         |
| QLD                 | Queensland Fire Department                     | 13 74 68     | <a href="https://fire.qld.gov.au">fire.qld.gov.au</a>       |
| VIC                 | Country Fire Authority (CFA) /<br>VicEmergency | 1800 226 226 | <a href="https://cfa.vic.gov.au">cfa.vic.gov.au</a>         |
| SA                  | SA Country Fire Service (CFS)                  | 1800 362 361 | <a href="https://cfs.sa.gov.au">cfs.sa.gov.au</a>           |
| WA                  | Dept of Fire & Emergency Services<br>(DFES)    | 13 33 37     | <a href="https://dfes.wa.gov.au">dfes.wa.gov.au</a>         |
| TAS                 | Tasmania Fire Service (TFS)                    | 1800 000 699 | <a href="https://fire.tas.gov.au">fire.tas.gov.au</a>       |
| NT                  | SecureNT / Bushfires NT                        | 08 8999 3473 | <a href="https://securent.nt.gov.au">securent.nt.gov.au</a> |



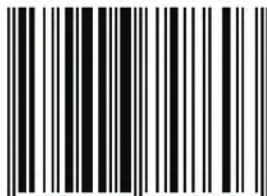


Emergencies like bushfires can be frightening, especially for young children. *Charlie's Birthday Adventure* was created to help families talk about evacuating in an emergency in a safe and reassuring way.

Through Charlie's eyes, children see that even when things don't go as planned, they can still feel safe with their family, comforted by special belongings, and supported by helpers in the community.

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