**What is going on in their brain?** 

Our brains are built to try and keep us safe when under threat. This means that when we are presented with a threatening, overwhelming or highly stressful experience, our brain will attempt to keep us alive and safe as a priority. To do this is minimises the use of the ‘thinking’ parts of the brain and focus’s solely on the perceived threat to survive.

Ongoing threatening or stressful situations such as the bushfires and Covid19 make it harder for kids to feel ‘safe’ as their brain is most likely still in survival mode. After several months of challenging situations their brains are attempting to respond to the ongoing changes and perceived threats and in doing so are frequently shutting down communication between different parts of the brain to focus on the ongoing changes and ensure safety and survival. This makes it very hard for our kids to focus, reason and get on with many day to day tasks.

Our brain sees learning as secondary to our need for overall safety and survival and so engaging the parts of brain required for attention, memory and other learning actions is very challenging at these times.

*What we can do to help the brain exit ‘survival’ mode and reengage in learning:*

* **Routines -consistency**. Our brains love to know what is coming next so that they don’t have to be prepared for the unexpected. If we put in place regular routines and structure in many of our day to day tasks, our brains know what will occur next and are less likely to anticipate threat unnecessarily.
* **Breathing** – It sounds basic, but regular, calm deep breathing activates our vagus nerve which assists in sending messages to the brain, heart and lungs to slow down and regulate. If we can take 3-5 slow, deep breaths this will assist hugely in increasing calm for our brain and body and assist the brain in getting back online.
* **Building and maintaining positive relationships** is a priority. Children will look to their primary attachment figures (parents, carers, grandparents etc) for reassurance and safety when feeling unsure, unsafe or overwhelmed. If we can stay connected to our kids at these times and model calm reassuring responses to all the change we are experiencing, they will learn to manage these challenging times in the same way. It will assist them to calm quicker and stop their brain feeling like it needs to be in threat mode.
* **Don’t panic** about missing out on learning! Our brains are amazingly complex and flexible. Children’s brains will adapt to new ways of doing things and are quick to repair, grow and engage again when needed.

