



# Guide for Parents



**RFS**



## Young volunteers in the NSW Rural Fire Service

Children and young people play an important role within the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) and in local communities. Participation in RFS activities can help children and young people connect with their community and develop a sense of social responsibility and service.

Programs for children and young people who join the RFS are delivered by local volunteers, so the opportunities for youth involvement in any given area will vary depending on volunteer availability and resources. Your local RFS District or brigade can advise of the options that are available in your area.





Typically, the avenues for young people to join the RFS are:

### **Join an ordinary brigade**

For those that do, Junior Members are not permitted to respond to emergencies however, they can participate in training and may assist with operational support activities like community engagement, catering and radio communications, with the rest of the brigade. The joining age for Junior Members may vary depending on the area, but is not younger than 12 years. When they turn 16 Junior Members can apply to become operational members (with parental consent) and attend emergency incidents with other brigade members, once they have completed the required training.

### **Join a Cadet Brigade**

Some areas have established Cadet Brigades specifically to provide training and development programs for young members. These brigades do not respond to emergency incidents and the majority of their members are either under 18 or designated adult leaders and coordinators. The joining age for Cadet Brigades may vary depending on the area, commencing at 12 years of age. Young people can remain in a Cadet Brigade up to the age of 18, when they can apply to transfer to an ordinary brigade if they wish.

### **Young people between 16 and 18**

If your child is between 16 and 18 years they can apply to join as either a junior or 'ordinary' member. Parental consent is required for both categories however only ordinary members will be able to attend emergency incidents once they have completed the required training.





## Membership

It is recommended that parents meet with brigade leaders before their child joins and regularly throughout their child's participation, to discuss the programs and arrangements that are in place locally to support young members. Not all Brigades will have the same procedures, as these can vary in each area.

To apply, an eMembership Application must be completed by the child, authorised by his or her parents and endorsed by the brigade and District Office. As a Junior Member of the RFS, a child:

- Is covered by insurance and workers' compensation provisions in the event of accident or injury;
- Can participate in authorised brigade activities which do not include operational response;
- Is entitled to wear RFS uniform appropriate to their role; and
- Has access to ONERFS - the website for RFS members.

While Junior Members cannot respond to emergency incidents such as bush fires, they can participate in supervised training which may include exposure to fire in a controlled environment. If you have concerns about the use of fire, please talk to the Brigade Captain or Junior Member Coordinator.



## A child-safe RFS

In the RFS, all members are required to adhere to the RFS Code of Conduct and organisational standards of best practice when working with young people. All Members who undertake child-related roles in the RFS are required to submit a Working with Children Check.

The RFS also requires Rural Fire Brigades who have members under the age of 18 to have arrangements in place relating to:

- Supervision
- Transportation
- Overnight activities (if applicable)
- Age appropriate activities
- Administration and access to records
- Provision of equipment and clothing appropriate to the role
- Medical and first aid requirements

To keep our members safe, the RFS has implemented Health Standards for all new and existing members. The Health Standards outline several health conditions, such as epilepsy and asthma, that may increase the risk of injury while performing certain roles.

To ensure our members can perform their role safely, current members are encouraged to disclose if they have a health condition to their District Manager, and all new members will be asked to disclose if they have these conditions when they apply.

Read our RFS Health Standards Handbook for Members for more information on the Health Standards.



## RFS websites and social media

Members of the RFS use websites and social media regularly for training, information and social interaction. Many of our members are active on forums and social media sites where people discuss the RFS, firefighting, or emergency services more generally. Some of these sites are authorised and monitored by the RFS, however many are not.

Whilst the RFS takes its role in online safety very seriously, on sites such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube etc, the RFS has no control over the privacy settings or conversations in areas that are not administered or monitored by authorised RFS personnel. Some of these sites may allow young people to interact directly with individuals they don't know offline.

The RFS has a Social Media policy and rules around respectful and inclusive behaviour. Please encourage your child to exercise appropriate caution online and report any concerns to [performance.conduct@rfs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:performance.conduct@rfs.nsw.gov.au).

## Qualifications and training

The RFS is a registered training organisation (RTO) and most training courses are aligned with national units of competency. The training is a combination of theory and practical sessions, and some units can be completed online. Junior Members who achieve competency receive qualifications that are recognised throughout Australia. The National Competencies achieved may be an asset on a young person's resume and may even contribute toward further qualifications and employment prospects in the future.

## Cost of involvement

There is no fee for joining the RFS, however some Brigades may set a minimal annual subscription. Uniforms, training and equipment are supplied where appropriate and may vary in each area.

## Responsibilities of parents

Parents are generally responsible for getting children to and from scheduled activities. Parental permission will be sought for travel to places other than the normal training area, such as visits to other brigades or to attend competitions.

Parents are advised to inform the Brigade Captain, or Junior Member Coordinator, of any medical condition, disability or special need affecting children including information about how to handle or treat the condition as well as any limitations the condition may present. It is important that this information be updated if things change.

It is also important that the Brigade Captain or Junior Member Coordinator always has up-to-date emergency contact details.

## Getting involved

As a parent, you are not required to attend training with your child – the program Leaders are there to provide guidance and supervision in a safe, fun environment. Keep in mind that our volunteers are running Junior Member Programs in their own time, in addition to their other brigade responsibilities. If you would like to help we encourage you to consider joining the RFS. You can become a Leader or Coordinator of Junior members, or take on one of the many other roles available in the RFS. No firefighting experience is necessary – just a passion for working with people and a willingness to help the community.

For more information on roles and joining the RFS visit [rfs.nsw.gov.au/volunteer/join-the-nsw-rfs](https://rfs.nsw.gov.au/volunteer/join-the-nsw-rfs)

## Membership support services

The welfare of emergency service personnel has long been recognised as being essential to the maintenance of efficient and effective emergency services agencies. This includes our young members who may be experiencing challenging life events in both the RFS and in their personal and family life. The RFS provides counselling and support services available to volunteers and their immediate family members.

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**For further information regarding youth participation in the RFS, please contact your local Brigade, Fire Control Centre or email [youthparticipation@rfs.nsw.gov.au](mailto:youthparticipation@rfs.nsw.gov.au)**

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