

Recovery: After the Wildfire

Children react and recover from wildfires and other disasters in a variety of ways, depending on their personal experience of the fire, previous experiences, and life circumstances. Below are guidelines for parents, caregivers, and educators that will help support the recovery of children after wildfires:

At Home: A Guide for Parents and Caregivers

- Children do best in secure, stable, and predictable environments. Try to create a calm, safe atmosphere and re-establish basic routines and every day activities as soon as possible.
- Be available to your child to answer questions about wildfires: how they start, how they spread, and how they are put out.
- Provide information appropriate to the age and level of understanding of children. Provide clear, simple, factual information, clarifying any misunderstandings. Be available to provide comfort, respond to concerns, and reassure them of your ability to care for them.
- Be informed and take protective steps for those with health risks, particularly for children with special health care concerns, such as asthma.
- After the fire is over, talk with your children about what happened and what they think can be done to make them feel more comfortable and safe. Help children understand that their experiences and reactions to the fires are normal.
- Assure children that friends and classmates are being taken care of by their families.
- Provide information as available about the status of schools, friends, and neighbors.
- The children of firefighters require special attention and support, specifically being reassured that their parent is well trained for this dangerous job.
- The loss of a pet can be profound for your child. Helping a child mourn the loss of a pet is vital to the recovery process.
- Adults should demonstrate that you can calmly handle difficult feelings, as children's functioning is influenced by their parents' ability to cope during and after a disaster.
- As everyone copes differently, learn what works for each member of your family and try to tolerate these differences.
- Encourage children to help others, as this can increase their sense of control and self-worth. For example, children (depending on their age) can be encouraged to participate in the clean-up process and plans for rebuilding.
- Monitor adults' conversations about the fires, as they may express thoughts, feelings, and memories in ways that might be misinterpreted by children and lead to increased anxiety.
- Monitor and limit the amount of exposure to media coverage of the fires.
- Learn--and discuss as a family--the school and community response plan.
- Keep in contact with your child's teacher and other adult caregivers about your child's experiences and reactions to the wildfires.
- You may notice your child's increased sadness and concern about the future. Give extra support, attention, and patience during this time.
- If you are concerned about your child's functioning, feelings, or behavior, seek professional help from a mental health provider with experience in trauma or grief.