

Helping Your Children Cope with Evacuation and Forest Fires

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How a child reacts to a wildfire, evacuation and the return to their community will be different for every child and is impacted by his/her experience, age, developmental stage and prior life experiences. Some children will withdraw; others will have outbursts of anger. Some will be anxious or irritable, others may exhibit sadness and fear. It is important to be sensitive to your child's coping style. It is common that children will mimic or mirror their parents, so it is very helpful for parents to be self-aware on their own coping skills as well. Your child will be seeking guidance from you.



The following is a list of typical reactions that children have following a natural disaster, forest fires and being evacuated from their home and community. Has your child experienced any of these reactions?

- Fear and worry about their safety, your safety and the safety of others (including pets). This may include fear of being separated from family members and worry about another wildfire
- Clinging to parents, siblings, or teachers, returning to earlier behaviors, such as baby talk, bedwetting, or tantrums
- Trouble concentrating or paying attention
- Withdrawal from others, lack of interest in usual activities, even playing with friends
- Angry outbursts or tantrums, Aggression toward parents, siblings, or friends
- Increase in physical complaints, such as headaches and tummy aches
- Long-lasting focus on the wildfire or increased sensitivity to the smell of smoke, sound of crackling fire, and hot dry winds
- Changes in sleep patterns, Changes in appetite
- Increase in teens' risky behaviors

Tips for Parents:

Here are a few things you can do to assist your child through this experience. Reassure children that they are safe, repeat this frequently even after the wildfire is out. Even though this is a busy and unsettled time for your family, spend extra time with your children, playing games outside, reading together indoors, or just cuddling. Be sure to tell them you love them.

1. As everyone **cope differently**, learn what works for each member of your family. Help family members tolerate these differences. Allow **time to talk** to your children. Reassure them that it is okay to ask questions, talk about their feelings and to share their worries, and that their reactions to the wildfires are normal.
2. Be a **role model**. Your child will be looking to you to know how to respond, and cope. Try to remain calm as this allows your child to learn how to handle stressful situations and change in the family. How you handle the situation, and your ability to directly influences your child's recovery and resilience. **Monitor adult conversations**. Be aware of what adults are saying about the wildfires or the damage and limit the amount of information your child sees on the news. Protect your child from too many graphic images and descriptions of the wildfire, including those on television, radio, newspapers, and online. Children listen to and overhear adults' conversations and may misinterpret what they hear, becoming unnecessarily frightened.
3. Offer to answer your child's questions about the wildfires: how they start, how they spread, and how firefighters contain and extinguish them. Issues may come up more than once and parents should remain patient and open to answering questions and clarifying the situation. **Answer questions briefly and honestly** and ask your children for their opinions and ideas.



Should you need information about community resources, - programs and services, simply **dial 211** on your phone or visit211WB on Facebook.

If you are in crisis, **call the Crisis Line 780-743-4357**