

Helping Children After a Natural Disaster: Tips for Parents and Educators

Adults can help children manage their reactions after a natural disaster. Follow these key reminders and visit www.nasponline.org/natural-disaster to learn more.



Remain Calm and Reassuring

Children, especially young ones, take cues from adults. Acknowledge loss or destruction, but emphasize efforts to clean up and rebuild. Assure them family and friends will take care of them and over time things will get better.



Acknowledge and Normalize Most Feelings

Allow children to discuss feelings and concerns, but don't force them to talk about the disaster. Listen, empathize, and let them know most initial reactions are normal. Be attentive to, and obtain assistance for, feelings and concerns that may suggest that the child (or anyone else) is in harm's way.



Emphasize Resiliency

Competencies

Help children identify coping skills used in the past when scared or upset.

Strategies

Encourage prosocial behaviors and good physical health.

Awareness

Highlight communities that have recovered from natural disasters.



Strengthen Peer Support

Children with strong emotional supports are better able to cope with adversity. Especially among adolescents, peer relationships can decrease isolation and supplement support from caregivers who are experiencing their own distress.



Take Care of Your Own Needs

You will be better able to help children if you are coping well. Take time to address your own reactions as fully as possible. Talk to other adults, take care of your physical and mental health, and avoid using drugs or alcohol to feel better.



Seek Help for Prolonged Signs of Distress

With the help of naturally occurring social support systems, most children will be fine. However, some may have reactions requiring professional help. Consider getting professional support for children whose reactions continue or worsen after a week or more. Your child's school can be a great source of support.



Helping Your Child Recover From Trauma

Emotional scars from the fires can take years to heal. That's why it's important to address the ongoing mental health of those who are most vulnerable: our children. Thankfully, any parent, teacher, or adult who works with children can be a possible source of healing when armed with the right tools.

Signs of Distress

All children grieve differently. Here are some common signs that a child could be struggling to adjust.

- Trouble sleeping
- Separation anxiety
- Fear of going to school
- Trouble concentrating
- Withdrawal
- Increased irritability or anxiety
- Loss of academic performance
- Regressive behaviors in young children (bedwetting, tantrums)
- Depression, lack of interest in activities they usually enjoy
- Substance abuse
- Physical symptoms such as headaches or fatigue
- No symptoms after experiencing a significant trauma



Learn more at
scoe.org/traumahelp



Sonoma County
Office of Education

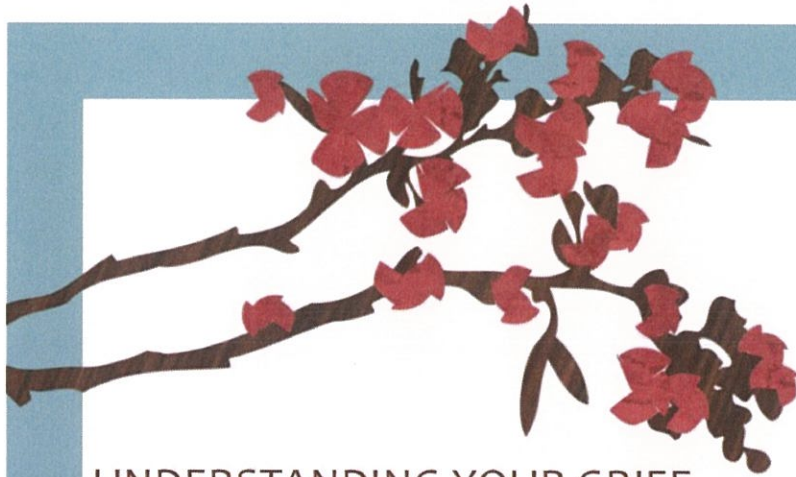
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What You Can Do

A supportive response can help a child heal and even grow after a traumatic experience. Here are a few tips:

- **Be there:** Perhaps the most important thing you can do is talk with—and listen to—your children. Be sure to let them know it is OK to ask questions and share their feelings.
- **Be flexible with expectations:** Patience, flexibility, and extra attention can all give children the room they need to heal. This can include gentle reminders or added help with chores or homework.
- **Be a role model:** Children take cues for how to handle stressful situations from their parents, according to the National Child Traumatic Stress Network. Do your best to model calm behaviors and healthy self-care.
- **Take care of yourself:** You may be familiar with the advice “put your own air mask on first.” You can’t be a good role model if you are struggling yourself. Take time to make sure you are eating and sleeping well, getting exercise, and receiving proper medical care.
- **Seek professional help:** If a child you care for has shown signs of distress after the fires, consider consulting with a mental health professional for an evaluation.



UNDERSTANDING YOUR GRIEF

Grief Group

RECEIVE SUPPORT AND COPING SKILLS

ONGOING GROUP

6 :00PM – 7:30PM

CREEKSIDE COUNSELING CENTER

1170 INDUSTRIAL ST. REDDING, CA 96002

This group is designed for mature teens, adults, and senior citizens. It will last for 12 weeks and each session will be for an hour-and-a-half. The cost is \$15 per session and will be held in the upstairs conference room at Creekside Counseling Center in Redding.

“SHOULD YOU SHIELD THE VALLEYS FROM THE WINDSTORMS, YOU WOULD NEVER SEE THE BEAUTY OF THEIR CANYONS.”

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT: HEATHER MAULDIN @ (530) 646-9091 OR
ALLI TERRY @ (530) 722-9957 TO SIGN UP. OR DROP BY ALLI'S DESK AT
CREEKSIDE :)