

RESOURCES FOR SCHOOLS WHO ARE IN CRISIS

CALIFORNIA BUSINESSES AND NON-PROFITS COMING TOGETHER TO SUPPORT MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES FOLLOWING A DISASTER

The recent wildfires have challenged mental health professionals to develop a new system of support to promote the emotional healing of wildfire victims during the pandemic. If your school district has been impacted by wildfires, our hearts go out to you at this time of need. Research shows that the most prevalent mental health issues become more pronounced many months after the onset of the crisis and we would like to help you with some of the gaps you may have in accessing mental health services. This is a collaborative effort of agencies to provide district administrators with access to immediate assistance. We discussed how best to provide immediate and long-term support and divide up responsibilities based on areas of expertise. Below is a brief description with links to relevant resources. Partnering organizations are: The [California Association of School Counselors](#), [California Association of School Psychologists](#), [California Association of School Social Workers](#), [The California Alliance](#), and [Care Solace](#).

What you should know about trauma following a disaster.

Disasters can be defined as unexpected, disturbing, and stress-inducing events. The effects of natural disasters can be severe and far-reaching, with symptoms ranging considerably from one individual to another. Children who are directly affected by these events are a first point of concern. Developmentally, the healthy development of children and youth includes having a sense of trust and security, and that diminishes in a disaster.

Some of the terms associated with treatment following a disaster are: 1) normalizing processes, 2) Psychological First Aid, 3) Critical Incident Response, and 4) toxic stress. Children respond differently to trauma, with their reaction typically delayed over adults. There are several techniques to reduce the trauma, including:

1. Talking about the effects of the natural disaster within a debriefing protocol
2. Seeking and connecting with mental health services
3. Focusing on self-care

How to help school staff & other caregivers?

Teachers often face student mental health challenges they simply were not trained to handle. Responding to natural disasters is one of those situations. This is coupled with their own psychological recovery processes. School Counselors, School Psychologists and School Social Workers are trained to support teachers, students, and the community during these times. They provide deescalating interventions with groups of children and adults, along with professional development for teachers and other caregivers to give them the tools to support their students. They also collaborate with local mental health clinicians to support families with long-term therapeutic needs. Literature for teachers following a disaster: [American Academy of Experts in Traumatic Stress](#), [Practical Suggestions for Assisting Children in the Aftermath of a Tragedy](#), [Teacher Guidelines for Crisis Response](#), [Parent Guidelines for Crisis Response](#), [Traumatic Stress: An Overview](#), [A Practical Guide for Crisis Response in Our Schools](#), [Helping Children After a Wildfire: Tips for Parents](#), [Large Scale Natural Disasters: Helping Children Cope](#). For generalized COVID-19-related materials (i.e., lessons, sample letters, etc.): <http://covidk12counseling.org>

How can you access "Adopt a School" program?

To help meet crisis needs, the **"Adopt a School Program"** was created and will extend beyond the COVID-19 pandemic. This program matches schools impacted by a natural disaster or a school shooting with school-based mental health professionals who volunteer through the initial phases of the psychological recovery process. In some cases, they may be available for long-term support as well. Schools interested in this program may contact: adoptaschool@schoolcounselor-ca.org.

How Can Community Counseling Services Help?

There are several organizations that have also partnered to provide extended support:

- a. [Care Solace](#) is a 24x7, FERPA compliant mental health navigation service that provides students, staff and families with quick access to vetted mental health care providers matched to their needs regardless of their circumstances. Email Daniel Schwartz at daniel@caresolace.org for free services.
- b. California Alliance of Child and Family Services and the Catalyst Center is a 140+ member organization of chief executives that serves California's most vulnerable populations www.catalyst-center.org www.cacfs.org. This additional link accesses an interactive map of local services www.catalyst-center.org/resources.
- c. [Licensed Educational Psychologists](#) in private practice can be accessed through this link.

