



**Lytton
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Nation**

Mental Health in Children During Wildfires

Children's reactions to the wildfires and their aftermath are strongly influenced by how their parents, teachers, and other caregivers cope during and after the events. They often turn to these adults for information, comfort, and help. Below are common reactions parents may see in their children. These generally diminish with time, but knowing that these reactions are common can help you be prepared to help your child.

Common Reactions

- Feelings of anxiety, fear, and worry about safety of self and others (including pets):
- Children may have increased fears and worries about separation from family members
- Young children may become more clingy to parents, siblings, or teachers
- Fears of wildfires spreading or new ones starting
- Distress and anxiety with reminders of the wildfires (e.g., burning smell, sounds of sirens or helicopters, burnt landscape and buildings)
- Changes in behavior:
- Increased activity level
- Decreased concentration and attention
- Increased irritability
- Withdrawal
- Angry outbursts
- Aggression
- Increased physical complaints (e.g., headaches, stomachaches, aches and pains)
- Prolonged focus on the wildfires (e.g., talking repeatedly about it – young children may “play” the event)
- Changes in sleep and appetite
- Lack of interest in usual activities, including interest in playing with friends
- Changes in school performance
- Regressive behaviors in young children (e.g., baby talk, bedwetting, tantrums)
- Increased chance of high-risk behaviors in adolescents (e.g., drinking, substance abuse, self-injurious behaviors)

How Can I Help My Child or Children ?

- Be a role model.
- Changes in living conditions can be extremely stressful for children.
- They will take cues of how to handle situations from their parents.
- Model calm behaviors during chaotic times.
- Encourage your children.
- Help children take care of themselves by encouraging them to get appropriate rest, exercise, and diet.



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- Be sure there is a balance of quiet and physical activities.
- Reassure children that you will keep them safe. This may need to be repeated many times during and after a wildfire.
- You should spend extra time with your children and stay connected. It doesn't matter whether it's playing games, reading together, or just cuddling.
- Be sure to tell children they are loved.
- Maintain routines. Even in the midst of chaos and change, children feel more safe and secure with structure and routine. As much as possible, stick to everyday routines (including mealtimes, bedtime, etc.).
- Maintain expectations. Stick with family rules, such as rules about good behavior and respect for others.
- Limit media exposure. It is important for you to protect your child from overexposure to sights and images of the wildfires, including those in newspapers, on the internet, or on television.

"Promise me you'll always remember — you're braver than you believe, and stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think." - Christopher Robin from Winnie the Pooh