



Southern California Wildfires: Coping After a Disaster

Coping with the devastating affects of a natural disaster, such as a wildfire in your community or region, can be extremely challenging. You may be dealing with immediate concerns about property or safety, but it is very important to remember also that when coping with disaster your emotional well-being is just as important as your physical well-being. For personal support, **call your support number on liveandworkwell.com or our public Crisis Hotline 866-342-6892.**

Reactions to Disaster –

Individuals react to disasters differently, and how they deal with stress is oftentimes related directly to what they have experienced in the past. It is not uncommon for a natural disaster to stir up many different feelings and thoughts.

According to the Red Cross, many individuals affected by a disaster experience the following:

- Fear about their safety or safety of a loved one
- Shock
- Disbelief
- Grief
- Anger
- Guilt

In some cases, people experience memory problems, anxiety, and/or depression.

After a Disaster: Self-Care Tips for Dealing with Stress –

There are a few things that you can do to deal with the stress that accompanies a natural disaster. The following information is from the Center for Mental Health Services website.

[See the reverse side for things to remember, ways to reduce stress and signs to watch for that indicate that professional help may be useful. Read the entire article (including special advice related to children, seniors, pets and more) and get additional resources on Liveandworkwell.com – see “Wildfires Endanger Southern California” Special Alert.]

[Liveandworkwell](http://Liveandworkwell.com) is a free, convenient online resource available to you and your family because of your benefit package. To enter:

1. At www.liveandworkwell.com, register/Login or use Access Code Only entry option-enter with your Access Code or use “PacifiCare”, “PacifiCare-WA”, “PacifiCare-OR”, or “PacifiCare-NV ” depending on your location. OR
2. From PBHI.com, select “Member” and get login information. Once into your [liveandworkwell](http://liveandworkwell.com) site, view the **Special Alert** for local resources (rotating bar near top of page).

Things to Remember When Trying to Understand Disaster Events –

- No one who sees a disaster is untouched by it.
- It is normal to feel anxious about you and your family's safety.
- Profound sadness, grief, and anger are normal reactions to an abnormal event.
- Acknowledging our feelings helps us recover.
- Focusing on your strengths and abilities will help you to heal.
- Accepting help from community programs and resources is healthy.
- We each have different needs and different ways of coping.
- It is common to want to strike back at people who have caused great pain. However, nothing good is accomplished by hateful language or actions.

Signs that Adults Need Stress Management Assistance –

- Difficulty communicating thoughts
- Difficulty sleeping
- Difficulty maintaining balance
- Easily frustrated
- Increased use of drugs/alcohol
- Limited attention span
- Poor work performance
- Headaches/stomach problems
- Tunnel vision/muffled hearing
- Colds or flu-like symptoms.
- Disorientation or confusion
- Difficulty concentrating
- Reluctance to leave home
- Depression, sadness
- Feelings of hopelessness
- Mood-swings
- Crying easily
- Overwhelming guilt and self-doubt
- Fear of crowds, strangers, or being alone

Ways to Ease the Stress –

- Talk with someone about your feelings —anger, sorrow, and other emotions—even though it may be difficult.
- Don't hold yourself responsible for the disastrous event or be frustrated because you feel that you cannot help directly in the rescue work.
- Take steps to promote your own physical and emotional healing by staying active in your daily life patterns or by adjusting them. This healthy outlook will help yourself and your family. (e.g., healthy eating, rest, exercise, relaxation, meditation.)
- Maintain a normal household and daily routine, limiting demanding responsibilities of yourself and your family.
- Spend time with family and friends.
- Participate in memorials, rituals, and use of symbols as a way to express feelings.
- Use existing supports groups of family, friends, and church.
- Establish a family emergency plan. Feeling that there is something that you can do can be very comforting.

By Karen Clevering, Clinical Content Editor, © 2003 liveandworkwell.com. All rights reserved.

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