

## Coping through the aftermath of a natural disaster

People in your area are faced with the fact that their homes, neighbourhoods and communities may have been damaged or completely destroyed by the forest fires. Across affected areas, people are anxious and uncertain about what will be their next steps and what measures to take.

Personal and financial losses have been incurred as a result of the forest fires and potential evacuations. You, family members and co-workers may experience reactions that seem to come out of nowhere. These types of reactions and behaviours are normal and are a way of helping us to process the anxiety and uncertainty of the present situation.

Having witnessed events beyond your personal control, you may be feeling powerless or helpless. The devastation of a forest fire may be a source of concern about your future safety and security.

You, your family members and your co-workers are each being impacted. You have feelings about what is going on and how you are trying to handle things. It is important to remember that there is no right or wrong way to cope with the present circumstances. Everyone will cope in an individual, personal and private way.

The emotional strain of going through a period of uncertainty can bring out a number of physical and emotional reactions. The reactions experienced can be uncomfortable, impacting concentration, productivity and focus even disrupting sleep patterns.

Some emotional and physical responses might be:

- Quiet, distracted
- Increase irritability
- Changes in appetite
- Heightened sensitivity
- Nightmares
- Increased anxiety
- Questioning priorities
- Verbal outbursts
- Reluctance to travel
- Fearful of sudden changes

For each person there is a trigger that reminds us of feelings linked to an emotionally difficult event. It is important to be alert to these triggers and to be aware of what you can do if they happen to you, a co-worker or to a family member.

So what can you do?

- Be extra patient.
- Be aware/more alert to changes.
- Talk to each other/check-in with each other/acknowledge each others' concerns.
- Encourage lots of talk and be open to conversation and reflection about what is going on.
- Realize that the emotions of victims will roller-coaster and moods can change unexpectedly.
- Remember that you have a choice in how much and when you or your family are exposed to the media coverage of these events.

- Don't overlook children's feelings. Some children may be clingy, act out or display regressive behaviour. They need to feel they can count on you for extra attention, love and support.

Reassure them. Make sure they understand they are not responsible for the difficulties you are facing as a family.

For yourself and other caregivers:

- Make sure that you are talking too; don't keep feelings inside.
- Eat healthy well-balanced meals.
- Review your priorities; keep in mind that your partner may have a differing viewpoint on what should be considered top priority.
- Don't expect things to instantly restore themselves. Accept that restoration, physical and emotional, takes time.
- Limit alcohol and caffeine consumption.
- If you find yourself being upset or disturbed by the news, limit your exposure by turning off the radio and TV.

It's important for you, your family member or co-workers understand that the reactions displayed are automatic, individual and not predictable in anyway. Here is a list of reactions that you can use as a guide to check your own responses.

Normal reactions to stress:

**Physical:**

- |                                 |                            |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| • Profuse sweating/night sweats | • Overall sense of fatigue |
| • Upset stomach                 | • Headaches                |
| • Nightmares                    | • Muscle tension           |

**Cognitive:**

- |                              |  |
|------------------------------|--|
| • Problems concentrating     | • Difficulty making decisions            |
| • Poor attention span        | • Re-occurring thoughts of the situation |
| • Short term memory problems |  |

**Emotional:**

- |   |                      |
|---|----------------------|
| • Sadness                               | • Irritability/anger |
| • Guilt/ Grief                          | • Feelings "if only" |
| • Fear of repetition of the event       | • Anxiety            |
| • Feeling disconnected/emotionally numb | • Feeling alone      |

**Safety tips**

1. Cooperate fully with local authorities and rescue squads.
2. Always tell someone (family member) where you are going and when you will return (make your whereabouts known!)



3. Do not use any natural gas or electrical systems or appliances until a professional gas technician or electrician has checked them.
4. Obey health regulations and directives. They have been issued to protect you, your loved ones and co-workers and to prevent infection and the spread of disease.

**How Your EFAP can help**

Remember that wherever you are, the confidential Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP) services are accessible to you. Emotional support services are available and accessible 24 hours a day seven days a week.

**Call your [Employee and Family Assistance Program \(EFAP\)](#) 24 hours a day, seven days a week at [1.800.387.4765](tel:18003874765) or visit [workhealthlife.com](http://workhealthlife.com).**