

Tips for Managing Your Distress Related to the Wildfires

Even if you are not directly affected by wildfires, you may experience a sense of distress or vulnerability by living close by or watching the destruction unfold in news reports. This can be especially true if you have family or friends who may be impacted by the disaster and you do not yet know about their safety and wellbeing.

Here are some tips to manage your distress:

- Take a news break. Watching endless replays of footage from the fires can make your stress even greater. Although you'll want to keep informed - especially if you have loved ones affected by the disasters - take a break from watching the news.
- Be kind to yourself. Some feelings when witnessing a disaster may be difficult for you to accept. You may feel relief that the disaster did not touch you, or you may feel guilt that you were left untouched when so many were affected. Both feelings are common.
- Keep things in perspective. Although a disaster often is horrifying, remember to focus as well on the things that are good in your life.
- Find a productive way to help if you can. Many organizations are set up to provide financial or other aid to victims of natural disasters. Contributing or volunteering can be a way to gain a sense of “control” over the event.
- Look for opportunities for self-discovery and recognize your strengths. People often learn something about themselves and may find that they have grown in some respect as a result of persevering through hardship. Many people who have experienced tragedy and adversity have reported better relationships, greater sense of personal strength even while feeling vulnerable, increased sense of self-worth, deeper spirituality, and heightened appreciation for life.

Here are some additional recommendations:

For many people, using the tips mentioned above may be sufficient to get through the current crisis. At times, however, an individual can get stuck or have difficulty managing intense reactions. A licensed mental health professional such as a psychologist can assist you in developing an appropriate strategy for moving forward. It is important to get professional help if you feel like you are unable to function or perform basic activities of daily living. You can find psychologists near you by contacting your state psychological association.

Persevere and trust in your ability to get through the challenging days ahead. Following some tips from this guide may be helpful.

(Adapted from “Managing Traumatic Stress: Dealing with the Hurricanes from Afar” and Tips for College and University Students: Managing Your Distress in the Aftermath of School Shootings.)

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