



## How to Talk to Children About the Carr Fire

As a parents and caregivers, you may be struggling with how to talk with children about the recent wildfires. It is important to remember that children look to their parents to make them feel safe. This is true no matter what age your children are.

As our community heals, here are some ways you can help children no matter if they are toddlers, teens or young adults:

### Talk with them.

Talking to children about their worries is the first step to help them feel safe and begin to cope with traumatic events. The conversation may not seem easy, but discussing difficult events in age-appropriate language can help a child feel safer and more secure. Children often learn or know when something sad or scary happens. If adults don't talk to them about it, a child may overestimate what is wrong or misunderstand adults' silence. So, be the first to bring up the difficult topic.

### When and how should you talk to them?

- **Find times when they are most likely to talk.** Such as riding in the car, before dinner or at bedtime can be ideal times.
- **Listen to their thoughts and point of view.** Don't interrupt — allow them to express their ideas and understanding before you respond. Find out what they know. Ask them “What have you heard about this?” And then listen.
- **Express your own opinions and ideas without putting down theirs.** Acknowledge that it's okay to disagree. It's OK to acknowledge your feelings with children. They see you are human. Parents hear it often: Be a role model. This applies to emotions, too.
- **Above all, reassure.** Let children know that you will do everything you can to keep them safe and to watch out for them.
- **Keep home a safe place.** Children, regardless of age, often find home to be a safe haven when the world around them becomes overwhelming. Help make home a place where children find the peace and the comfort they need. Plan a night where everyone participates in a favorite family activity.

- **Watch for signs of stress, fear or anxiety.** After a traumatic event, it's normal for children (and adults) to experience a wide range of emotions, including fearfulness, shock, anger, grief and anxiety. Your children's behaviors may change because of their response to the event. They may experience trouble sleeping, difficulty with concentrating on school work or changes in appetite. Their behaviors may regress (tantrums, biting, babytalk). This is normal for everyone and should begin to disappear in a few months.
- **Help kids express themselves.** Encourage your children to put their feelings into words by talking about them or journaling. Some children may find it helpful to express their feelings through art.
- **Take “news breaks.”** Your children may want to keep informed by gathering information about the event from the Internet, television or newspapers. It is important to limit the amount of time spent watching the news because constant exposure may actually heighten their anxiety and fears.
- **Take care of yourself.** Take care of yourself so you can take care of your children. Be a model for your children on how to manage traumatic events. Keep regular schedules for activities such as family meals, bed times and exercise to help restore a sense of security and normalcy.

These tips and strategies can help you guide your children through the current crisis. If you are feeling stuck or overwhelmed, you may want to consider talking to someone who could help. A licensed mental health professional such as a psychologist can assist you in developing an appropriate strategy for moving forward. **You can access mental health resources by calling (530) 225-5200.**

**Additional resources:**

[www.triplepshasta.com](http://www.triplepshasta.com)

[www.first5shasta.org](http://www.first5shasta.org)