



## Talking to Children About the Fires in Los Angeles

As Los Angeles reels from the devastating fires in the Palisades, Altadena area, and across LA, we at OUR HOUSE Grief Support Center understand that adults may struggle to find the words to comfort and support their children. Because of fears about saying the “right” thing or of upsetting their children further, they may avoid talking about it altogether. If this happens, children are left alone with their thoughts, fears, and questions, increasing their anxiety about what is happening. Providing your child with truthful and age-appropriate information shows them that you are available to talk about it and that they can trust you with their thoughts and feelings.

The following are some suggestions for how to approach the conversation, address emotions, and increase feelings of safety and containment for children.

1. Orient yourself and your child to what IS safe, controllable, and true in the moment. For example, *“We are together, and we are safe where we are. I will do everything I can to help us all stay safe and healthy. Let’s take a few deep breaths together to remember that our bodies are ok.”*
2. If you are more removed from the fires, determine if your child has heard about the event by asking *“Has anything happened today that you have questions or feelings about?”* Alternatively, *“did they talk at school today about anything that happened in our city?”* Respond truthfully. Encourage them to share their thoughts and feelings about the fires with you. It is not realistic to think that you can shield your school-aged children from the truth. It is always better for children to hear about difficult information from the people they trust. Assess their level of exposure to the facts. Be prepared to add truthful information if the child wants to know details. Answer in an age-appropriate and honest way. For example: *“A bad fire caused a lot of people to lose their homes. The city and our community are doing all we can to help each other.”* Then follow up by saying *“Do you have any questions?”* Add pertinent information in direct response to their questions.
3. Provide a safe environment for your child to express their concerns and feelings. Let them know that all of their feelings are ok. Each family member will respond in their own unique way. You can be honest with them about how you are feeling in a contained way but assure them that you can handle your own feelings and are there to support them.
4. Take good care of your own physical and emotional needs! The more ok you are the more ok your children will feel. Model healthy ways to cope. For example: talk to other adults that you trust; move your body through exercise, walking, stretching, etc.; eat regular meals and drink water; limit your own exposure to media coverage of the event, outside of what is necessary to be informed and prepared.
5. Limit your child’s exposure to news coverage and adult conversations about the fires as much as possible. Monitor TV and internet usage.

6. Decrease night-time anxieties by preparing your child for bedtime. Turn off television and computers and engaging in soothing activities such as listening to soft music, taking warm baths, and for young children, reading bedtime stories.
7. Seek professional help if your child exhibits extreme changes in their sleeping, eating, or mood, or if you are concerned about the way your child is behaving.
8. When some sense of normalcy has returned, develop a plan with your family. Include the names of the people who would care for your children if you were unable to care for them—children often worry about this but aren't able to express this fear. Ask what would help them feel safe and talk about how to do this as a family.
9. Involve children in ways to honor those who are impacted. Action can help decrease feelings of helplessness. For example, volunteering, sending a donation to a reputable help organization, or reaching out to support families directly affected by the fires.

For more information, visit [www.OurHouse-Grief.org](http://www.OurHouse-Grief.org) or call (310) 473-1511