

• c o n n e c t i o n s •

mental health & substance abuse resources

A partnership of the Health District and Touchstone Health Partners

Coping during and after the High Park Fire

A major event like the High Park Fire can create stress, anxiety and sadness for those both directly and indirectly affected. These are normal feelings to experience when faced with such an abnormal and traumatic situation. People often underestimate the impact stress could have on them and their families and how much it can impact their health. Here are some common reactions people might experience in the days and weeks ahead - and some ways to build resilience.

Common reactions

Anxiety, numbness or feeling powerless • Feeling disoriented, difficulty making decisions or making poor choices
Sleeping problems, nightmares or changes in eating • Sadness, depression and crying • Irritability and anger
Physical problems (headache, stomach problems) • Increased use of alcohol and drugs • Fear about the future

Tips for coping

- **Ask for help if you need it.** If you are feeling overwhelmed, talk with someone. You can start with a trusted friend, relative or minister – or you may want to talk with a mental health professional, since they have special training in how to help people cope with high stress. *Asking for help is an important positive step for your future health.* You can call Connections anytime (or walk in M-F, 8 a.m.- 4 p.m., at 525 W. Oak St., Fort Collins). Those directly affected by the fire can talk to a professional at an Evacuation Center or Disaster Recovery Center.
- **Talk about it.** Talking with others, especially friends and family, can relieve stress and build community.
- **Take care of yourself.** Eat (healthy foods are best), sleep, and get exercise. When you can, maintain your normal routines.
- **Take things one at a time** and break big things into smaller, doable tasks.
- **Help others if you can.**
- **Avoid drugs and excessive drinking.**

Helping children

Children and teens may have a variety of reactions and feelings to the fire. Behaviors to watch for include acting out; being aggressive, reverting to behaviors typical of a younger age (which is quite normal), avoiding play time, friends or normal summer activities; or competing for the attention of parents. Re-creating the situation in play is also typical for younger children.

Tips for helping children cope:

- Comfort them and reassure them they are safe. The younger the child, the less talk is necessary.
- Encourage them to share their feelings and concerns with you.
- Help them understand that there are no bad emotions, and a wide range of reactions is normal.
- Make a family emergency plan, which can be comforting.
- Monitor children's TV/Internet coverage of the fire; talk with them about what they are seeing and encourage questions. Use words they can understand, be open and honest, and admit when you can't answer all of their questions.
- Maintain normal routines as much as possible (bedtimes, meals).
- Help them identify caring, heroic actions, and help others when possible.

**If you are feeling overwhelmed and need help coping, you can call
Connections at (970) 221-5551 or visit in person at 525 W. Oak St. in Fort Collins.**
