

WILDFIRE RECOVERY

SAFETY

MORE OF THIS

WHAT:

Physical & emotional safety first. Get as settled as you can, somewhere as safe as you can. Emotional safety includes self-soothing, self regulation, receiving support, doing less, slowing down.

WHY:

When you get yourself more emotionally secure and centered, you can share your calm with your child.

LESS OF THIS

WHAT:

Worrying about next month, keeping up academic progress for kids, social plans, travel plans, appointments, etc.

WHY:

Kids processing trauma may have disrupted sleep, loss of interest in activities, and difficulty focusing, so it's wise to ease expectations for now.

ADAPT LIKE THIS

WHAT:

Explain clearly to neurodivergent kids that NOW is a time for staying safe, calm, and together. Low expectations. Waiting to resume regular life. It's a NOT NOW time for pressure on ourselves or on kids.

WHY:

Neurodivergent kids may need clear, concrete explanations about why schedules and expectations are suddenly different.

SAFETY

Family Time

Honesty

Routine

School

Media Exposure

Social

WILDFIRE RECOVERY

HONESTY

MORE OF THIS

WHAT:

Be honest with your kids if you are overwhelmed, sad, still processing, etc. Provide space for kids' feelings to be communicated. Validate feelings of loss, no matter what the loss (e.g. backpack, stuffed animal, favorite clothing).

WHY:

To restore trust in reality and rebuild a sense of security and reliability.

LESS OF THIS

WHAT:

Trying to hide or deny that you have feelings, or trying to minimize yours or theirs in any way. Try to avoid "at least it wasn't as bad as _____" or other minimizing comparisons.

WHY:

You may need to pause emotional processing to be able to function during the crisis. Kids may need to "freeze" (as in fight/flight/freeze) before they can express feelings.

ADAPT LIKE THIS

WHAT:

Give a lot of time for neurodivergent kids to process feelings, then give more. Allow alternatives to identifying and verbalizing feelings, like drawing, listening to music, or showing you a social media post that they identify with.

WHY:

Neurodivergent kids need adults to validate alternative ways of identifying and navigating big emotions.

Safety

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WILDFIRE RECOVERY MEDIA EXPOSURE

MORE OF THIS

WHAT:

Check in with yourself to monitor how incoming news is impacting you. You may need to alter the amount or type of information that you and your child are taking in.

WHY:

Repeated exposure to trauma-related information can compound the impact.

LESS OF THIS

WHAT:

Doomscrolling, following local news, being glued to Watch Duty. Avoid displaying wildfire footage on TV in a common area. If your child has been in the position of being a hub of online information for the family, transition them back into a child's role.

WHY:

Children need as much protection as possible from trauma overload.

ADAPT LIKE THIS

WHAT:

Find a middle ground of sharing enough information without sharing ALL the information with your child. Consider age, maturity, anxiety levels, and degree of difficulty with self regulation and "big picture" thinking.

WHY:

Neurodivergent children may need adults to walk a very fine line between just enough and too much information.

Safety
Family Time

Honesty
Routine School

MEDIA EXPOSURE
Social

WILDFIRE RECOVERY

FAMILY TIME

MORE OF THIS

WHAT:

Balance your self care and responsibilities with small, daily moments of family connection. Screen time often increases during crisis, but remember to incorporate screen-free time to connect each day. Build a fort, play a simple game, listen to music, read a short chapter of a favorite book.

WHY:

Connection with family is good medicine for trauma. Comic relief is also healing. Those small moments really do add up, and they matter.

LESS OF THIS

WHAT:

No need to feel that you should entertain your kids constantly or engage with them as you would on a normal day. But once the emergency stage has passed, kids need adults to help them avoid being oversaturated with online content.

WHY:

Pumping the brakes on screen time can make the "transition off" easier for everyone down the line and avoid overexposure.

ADAPT LIKE THIS

WHAT:

If your neurodivergent child normally relies too heavily on screens, a crisis is not the time to make big changes. Help your child transition off screens with a few minutes warning and an offer of specific, alternative, preferred activities. If your child has great difficulty transitioning off screens, seek professional help.

WHY:

Excessive screen time can become self reinforcing and keep neurodivergent kids from healthier sources of comfort and connection.

Safety

FAMILY TIME

Honesty

Routine

Media Exposure

School

Social

WILDFIRE RECOVERY ROUTINE

MORE OF THIS

WHAT:

Stick with as many of your usual routines as you can. These can include shared family meals, running errands, activities of daily living like bathing/hygiene, dressing, and sleep routines.

WHY:

This provides a semblance of expectation, order, and predictability.

LESS OF THIS

WHAT:

Drifting through time without enough structure. Allowing children and teens to opt out of everything and stay in their rooms.

WHY:

Having no plan and no timeframe can be distressing to the family system. Too much free time without structure compounds the sense of being unmoored.

ADAPT LIKE THIS

WHAT:

Make a visual map of new routines and timeframes. Put the new plan in a common area that everyone can refer to. Create the new plan with your child/teen. Be flexible and willing to modify the new routine as needed.

WHY:

Help minimize anxiety around the unknown. Visuals help with comprehension when emotional processing is overloaded.

Safety
Family Time

Honesty
ROUTINE

Media Exposure
School Social

WILDFIRE RECOVERY SCHOOL

MORE OF THIS

WHAT:

Parents will need to support a variety of return-to-schooling plans, while processing concerns with other adults. Returning to school will look different for each family and school. Parents whose children's schools were most impacted will need to be the most adaptable and pragmatic.

WHY:

School is vitally important to your child's routine, development, sense of normalcy, and sense of "group efficacy."

LESS OF THIS

WHAT:

Minimize negative messaging to kids about various return-to-schooling plans and scenarios; avoid COVID comparisons. Parents will need to provide as much encouragement and support to their children and teens as they realistically can.

WHY:

Nothing will be perfect, yet students will be required to attend school daily, so they will require parent support. COVID comparisons will be highly triggering.

ADAPT LIKE THIS

WHAT:

Neurodivergent students may have an even harder time than others returning to school in a different space and/or in a different format. The change itself may require appropriate processing and support, such as a visit day or counseling prior to returning.

WHY:

Many neurodivergent children have difficulty with transitions due to their nervous systems' interpretation of changes as physical threats.

Safety
Family Time

Honesty
Routine

Media Exposure
SCHOOL
Social

WILDFIRE RECOVERY

SOCIAL

MORE OF THIS

WHAT:

Younger children will likely rely more on their parents for connection and meeting social needs but may need to hear that their friends are OK, while adolescents may rely more on their peers and friends for comfort.

WHY:

Social connection and reassurance is an important antidote to a community trauma. Comparing notes on the fires, exchanging news, and spending time in play are all part of integrating the event.

LESS OF THIS

WHAT:

Try to avoid the pressure of arranging playdates for younger kids. Try to avoid curtailing teens' access to friends.

WHY:

Your child may want to stick close to you and may not yet be ready to socialize with others. If your teen feels cut off from their friends, they may feel more displaced and disoriented.

ADAPT LIKE THIS

WHAT:

Neurodivergent kids will have a wide variety of social needs and capacities in a time of crisis. Some will take comfort from connections with friends, while others will have no social energy and may avoid texting, gaming, or in-person social "demands."

WHY:

It takes many neurodivergent kids more cognitive effort to think through social interactions, even basic texting. In a crisis, much of their capacity is already in use for coping.

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SOCIAL