

“While natural disasters capture headlines and national attention short-term, the work of recovery and rebuilding is long-term.”
Sylvia Mathews Burwell

Recommended Resources for Families

Konocti Unified: Returning
Students to School after the
Clayton Fire | August 2016

Thank you to all the fire personnel for unyielding commitment and to the community members, families and educators in KUSD who do the “heavy lifting” every day.

Essential First Steps for All Professionals Who Help Children

STEP 1: Make sure that you (the helper) are emotionally ready

STEP 2: Know your limits and where/who to call for referrals and assistance

STEP 3: Provide the student/child with a safe and comfortable environment to express his or her feelings. (Classroom setting and additional space within the classroom for expression)

STEP 4: Be flexible Let students have some control of the situation: ex., include natural and unscheduled breaks, consider monitored breaks and possibly monitored class out of room expeditions

STEP 5: Identify basic practical needs and ensure that these are met; Assess the student/child's physical status: Has he or she been fed, slept, and been kept safe? (**Report to Administration when there are concerns**).

STEP 6: What's Normal? What to Expect? Educate those affected about the common responses, and basic coping tools, to stressful and traumatic events. Schools should facilitate communication among families, students and community agencies.

STEP 7: Moving forward, Establishing Routines: Remind student/child of what makes them feel safe and what they still have (family/parents, friends, school, agencies are here to help and take care). Make necessary on-going referrals.

What can we (teachers, staff and schools) do to address the reactions of their students during and after a crisis situation?

Teachers and staff are on the “front lines” during and following a crisis situation to provide early and on-going intervention. This can be difficult and we need to remain composed and in control for students. Some students may not experience a reaction to the crisis *until days or weeks later*. It is important for teachers to remain observant, patient and sensitive to students' reactions in the coming weeks.

The following list suggests interventions that teachers may consider when addressing the reactions of students to a crisis situation:

- **Modeling:** Model appropriate reactions to the situation. Be sensitive, calm and caring.
- **Be Honest: Honesty and authenticity** is vital, share information and reassure kids that the world is a good place to be, but that there are people who do bad things
- **Sharing in the classroom/school:** Give students permission to verbalize what they are experiencing.

Students need to know that their fears and reactions are shared by others.

- **Multiple modes of expression:** Students should be given the opportunity to express themselves through multiple modes of communication (e.g., participating in gratitude projects, writing, and perhaps drawing or a quiet reading or space in the classroom) especially for those students who are hesitant to verbalize their feelings.
- **Circle-up:** Many teachers, at all grade levels, have found it useful to “circle-up” to establish a “check-in” before entering a challenging academic assignment/project.

Note: When students are discussing their feelings it is important to listen in a noncritical and nonjudgmental manner, with empathy and support. Communicate to students that their feelings are normal reactions to an abnormal situation. Students who are hesitant to verbalize their feelings should be encouraged but should not be forced.

- **Normal reactions to an abnormal situation:** Educating students about normal responses and emotions to the crisis is essential
- **Waves of emotion and time frame:** Typically, not always, the strong emotional reactions to a crisis situation are usually overcome **in one to six weeks** following the crisis. The long-term effects, however, could take weeks to months to dissipate.
- **Monitor for students who need additional support:** Some students who are experiencing significant difficulty may require more individualized care.

“Am I feeling normal?” Be explicit with students that their feelings are normal reactions to an abnormal situation

What are common reactions and responses to disaster?

- **You may have intense or unpredictable feelings.** You may be anxious, nervous, overwhelmed or grief-stricken. You may also feel more irritable or moody than usual.
- **You may experience changes in your thoughts and behavior.** You might have memories, physical reactions and it may be difficult to concentrate or make decisions.
- **You may have a sensitivity to environmental factors.** Sirens, loud noises and smells

“How do I cope?”

There are some reassuring statements you may use when talking with students.

- **“Give yourself time to adjust.”** Allow yourself time to mourn and be happy for the things you have.
- **“Ask for help, we care about you.”** support is key. Family, school-life and friends can all help support.
- **“Establish your routines as best you can.”** Includes going to school, eating meals, sleeping and exercise.
- **“Talk about your experience.”** Express your feelings, drawing, writing, playing ball.
- **“Mae sure you are participating in healthy behaviors”** get plenty of rest, try relaxation techniques. Avoid alcohol and drugs.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES & READING:

<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/recovering-disasters.aspx>

<http://www.elc-pa.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Trauma-Informed-in-Schools-Classrooms-FINAL-December2014-2.pdf>

http://www.nctsn.org/nctsn_assets/pdfs/Crisis%20Guide%20-%20NYU.pdf

<https://www.schoolcounselor.org/school-counselors-members/professional-development/2016-webinar-series/learn-more/helping-kids-during-crisis>

<http://www.nctsn.org>

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