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Info Bulletin

Helping Kids Cope with Fire Threat Helpful Information for you and your family

With an ongoing fire situation, many people are experiencing stress and anxiety. It is important for parents not to assume that their children view the fire threat the same way adults do. What children see through their eyes usually differs significantly from our own view. Here are some helpful tips from Interior Health for you and your family.

What to look for

The following signs often suggest your child may not be coping well with the fire threat:

- Excessive focus and talk about the situation
- Changes in sleep and eating patterns
- Nightmares
- Personality changes
- Regressing to younger behaviors (e.g. bedwetting, thumb sucking)
- Clinging to caregivers

Parents can help their children cope with the situation in the following ways:

- Shield children from unnecessary exposure to the situation.
 - They do not need to follow every detail of the story in the news.
 - Although interesting to adults who are capable of “perspective”, sightseeing trips to the fire may increase children’s anxiety.
- Encourage children to talk about their feelings.
 - Find ways for your child to express their feelings. Help them find words to label their feelings. Encourage them to draw a picture of the situation to start a discussion about their view.
 - Make sure the words you use describe their feelings, not yours.
 - Use words they understand. Young children may understand “worry” but not “anxiety”.
 - Common concerns may include: fear that they or someone they love will be hurt, fear they will be left alone, fear they will be separated from their family, worry that they caused the fire somehow.
- Calmly and confidently explain the situation. Give them only as much information as they need to answer their questions and address their concerns.
 - Children will read your confidence or your anxiety as a clue to how they should also feel.
 - If you give them more information than they are looking for you may risk introducing new worries unnecessarily.

- Assure them that you will be there to take care of them. That you will not let harm come to them.
- Keep the family together as much as practical.
- Maintain familiar routine as much as possible.
- Help distract them from a focus on the situation.
 - Play games, have fun together.
 - Play quiet, calming children's music

If the above strategies do not help, do not hesitate to seek professional help for your child. Contact your local child or adult mental health service or HealthLink BC <http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/kbaltindex.asp>
Available 24 Hours Toll Free at 8-1-1.

For more information visit our web site at www.interiorhealth.ca.

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