

From: CCC Chancellor's Office
Subject: CCC SMHP: Disaster Response for Colleges
Date: Monday, October 16, 2017 8:24:45 AM



The recent wildfires in Northern and Southern California have been disruptive and traumatic for communities throughout the state. The California Community Colleges (CCCs) in impacted areas are experiencing significant disruptions to school functioning, and face challenges to returning to normalcy. Many students, faculty, staff, and administrators have been directly affected by the loss of life and property from these fires.

The resources and information in this email are intended to help CCC communities through immediate and long-term recovery, including planning for future natural disasters.

Reactions and Symptoms After a Wildfire

The following strategies are adapted from the National Association of School Psychologist's guide, [Helping Children After a Wildfire: Tips for Parents and Teachers](#).

- Symptoms of distress after exposure to wildfire can include disturbances to sleeping and eating, agitation, increased conflict or delinquency, physical complaints, and poor concentration.
- Some people may use alcohol and other drugs as a means of coping with emotional distress.
- The sights, sounds, and smells associated with fire may cause continuing fear and anxiety. News reports or social media images can also provoke distress.
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a risk for some individuals exposed to wildfire. Signs may include those symptoms listed above, exhibited over a long period of time; feelings that a wildfire is happening again; nightmares; numbness or increased arousal, such as startle reactions; and other symptoms of distress. Screening and intervention are important.
- Symptoms of distress will vary depending on age, personal injury or loss of a loved one, relocation, level of family support, pre-existing risks like mental illness, and other factors.

Coping Strategies for College Students

The following strategies are adapted from SAMHSA's four-page [Tips for College Students: After a Disaster or Other Trauma](#) tipsheet.

- Talk about your emotions with peers, family, a professor, a counselor, or another trusted person. If you have physical ailments, visit the health center or talk to your physician.
- Take care of yourself. This includes exercising and stretching, deep breathing or meditation, and eating healthy meals when available.
- Take a break from social media and television.
- Avoid alcohol, tobacco, and drugs.
- Get back to your daily routines, even if you don't feel like it, to regain a sense of control.
- Get involved in your community and recovery efforts.

Coping and Support Strategies for Faculty and Staff

The following strategies are adapted from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network's [Wildfire](#) recovery page.

- Take care of yourself physically and emotionally, and take care of your own family. (See [After a Wildfire](#) wellness tips from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.)
- Communicate with other faculty and staff, and encourage others to support each other.
- Put off major decisions during the postwildfire period. Give yourself a break - avoid overdoing cleanup or recovery activities.
- Identify students who had direct experience with the wildfire, particularly those who suffered losses or had to evacuate, as they are at increased risk for distress.
- To support your students, plan shorter lessons, go at a slower pace, give less homework than usual, and expect a decline in performance for a short time.
- Encourage distressed students to meet with the school counselors.
- Suggest that your school review its crisis and emergency plans in order to better respond to future events.

Crisis Resources

[SAMHSA's Disaster Distress Helpline](#)

This Helpline provides crisis counseling and support to people experiencing emotional distress related to natural or human-caused disasters. Call **1-800-985-5990** or text **TalkWithUs to 66746** (Spanish: Hablanos) to connect with a trained crisis counselor.

[Crisis Text Line](#)

Anyone experiencing emotional crisis can text **HOME to 741-741** to communicate with a compassionate, trained crisis counselor. The Chancellor's Office partnered with Crisis Text Line to develop [outreach materials](#) for the CCCs (watch the [archived webinar](#) to learn more).

Ways to Help

[How you can help people affected by the North Bay fires](#)

Getting involved with fire recovery efforts is an effective way to promote emotional wellbeing. This article from the San Francisco Gate is updated with ways to volunteer, donate resources, and other helpful actions.

[Canyon Fire 2 in Anaheim Wildfire Response Information](#)

American Red Cross Desert to the Sea Region is collecting donations and providing resources related to the Anaheim wildfires.

Resources to Share with Students

[Tips for College Students: After a Disaster or Other Trauma](#)

This four-page SAMHSA tipsheet outlines signs of distress and ways that college students can cope with disaster in a healthy way.

[Disaster Preparedness for College Students](#)

Texas A&M Agrilife Extension compiled this list of action planning tips and emergency kit supplies specifically for college students. It includes considerations for living away from family and in a dorm or apartment.

[Tips for Handling the Emotional Impact of Harvey and Irma](#)

This short article from The Jed Foundation describes ways that college students can cope with disaster.

Resources for Faculty, Staff, Counselors, and Caregivers

[When Terrible Things Happen: For Adults](#)

This three-page tipsheet from the Psychological First Aid for Schools Field Operations Guide lists immediate and continuing reactions to an emergency, including potential positive changes in worldview. It also includes a checklist of coping strategies that do and do not help.

[Tips for Disaster Responders: Preventing and Managing Stress](#)

This SAMHSA tipsheet is a list of concise strategies for emergency responders before, during, and after a traumatic event or disaster. It focuses on practical strategies for planning, engaging with survivors, and self-care.

[Disaster Recovery](#)

This article from Academic Advising Today describes disaster phases (e.g., threat or warning phase, heroic phase) and how academic advisors can support college students both immediately and in the long term.

Resources for School Administrators

[Emergency Preparedness](#)

The California Community Colleges Chancellor's Office (CCCCO) developed emergency response standards and guidelines to assist the CCCs in planning for disaster response. This page includes links to resources and trainings.

[Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools \(REMS\) TA Center](#)

The REMS TA Center provides no-cost training, technical assistance, and resources to K-12 and higher education institutions. Resources include a [Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans](#) and [topic-specific links](#) related to Fire and Wildfire.

[Wildfires and Schools](#)

The National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities developed this tipsheet to help campuses assess and minimize their fire risk.

Thank you for your continued support to the mental health field!

Sincerely,
The CCC SMHP Team

www.cccstudentmentalhealth.org

The California Mental Health Services Authority (CalMHSA) is an organization of county governments working to improve mental health outcomes for individuals, families and communities. Prevention and Early Intervention programs implemented by CalMHSA are funded through the voter-approved Mental Health Services Act (Prop 63). Prop. 63 provides the funding and framework needed to expand mental health services to previously underserved populations and all of California's diverse communities.



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