

Our Future in Our Hands

*Reduce the impact a wildfire might have
on you and your community*



Oregon State
University

FORESTRY & NATURAL RESOURCES EXTENSION FIRE PROGRAM

**Care for Your
Mental Health**

EM 9404-c
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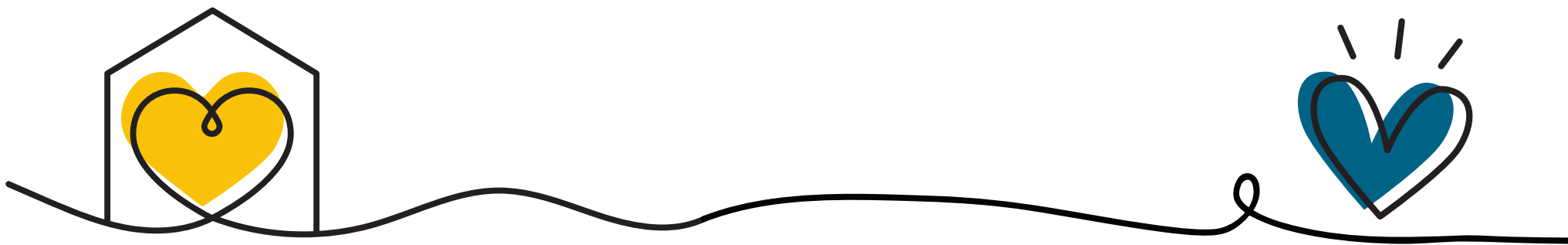
Care for Your Mental Health

Tools to support yourself and others before, during and after fires

Experiencing a wildfire can affect us physically, mentally and emotionally. It is estimated that 24%–41% of wildfire survivors experience mental health challenges. People often report grief, anxiety, anger, worry and sadness about what happened.

Victims of wildfire may have witnessed homes burning and felt fear for their life or the life of a loved one. Many experience financial losses and property damage. Some may feel a lack of support from family, friends or government organizations.

Here are a few tips and tools to support your mental well-being if you are affected by wildfire. This is not a complete list. If you or someone you know is experiencing mental health challenges due to wildfire, please contact a behavioral health care provider or other services for support.



BEFORE: Be ready

Planning ahead for a fire can help you feel more prepared during an emergency and give you tangible action steps to take.

- Learn how to prepare your family, home, important belongings and pets to evacuate. When you evacuate, pack items to support your mental health such as a book, game, soothing comfort foods, fidget toys, stuffed animals, a soft blanket, journal or photographs of loved ones. You can learn more about evacuation in *Make a Plan, EM 9404-a*.
- Talk with your children about preparing for wildfires and what to expect. Help them prepare their important items for evacuation and practice your plans with them.
- Clean up the outside of your home to get rid of flammable material like dead leaves and dry wood. Learn more about how to do this in *Prepare Your Home, EM 9404-b*.
- Find out what you can do if you lose your home in a wildfire, including where you might go for shelter, food, supplies or where to get help with paperwork.

Ask friends, co-workers and family members about what they are doing to prepare for fires. Share any worries, fears or uncomfortable emotions that you may be experiencing. This can help you process those emotions with people you trust, get more ideas for your preparedness plan and feel connected to others who may be experiencing the same thing.

DURING: Take care

- Check accurate local information sources such as county emergency management or the county sheriff's office to stay updated on the fire status and evacuations.
- If you are evacuated, try to find a safe place where you can get food, water, rest and medical care if needed for yourself, your family and your pets.
- Practice self-care. It is normal to go into "survival mode" and feel "off" during an emergency. It can also be hard to do what you would typically do to take care of yourself. Even if it may seem difficult to practice self-care during a fire, it is essential. Practice deep breathing and use calming self-talk.
- Keep a journal, try to maintain a schedule, take breaks from the news and social media, get enough sleep and reach out to others.
- Help children use these strategies too, and provide opportunities to play, talk or do other activities that they enjoy.

AFTER: Know the signs

Wildfires affect everyone differently. Signs of emotional distress after a fire could include:

- Eating or sleeping too much or too little
- Nightmares
- Flashbacks
- Angry outbursts
- Being easily startled
- Worrying or feeling guilty
- Restlessness and wariness
- Difficulty remembering things
- Sadness and depression
- Pulling away from people or things
- Having no or low energy, feeling tired
- Feeling afraid
- Unexplained aches and pains, like constant headaches or stomachaches
- Excessive smoking, drinking or abusing drugs or prescription medications
- Thinking of hurting or killing yourself or someone else

What to do

Because everyone experiences different impacts from wildfires, there is also a lot of variety in what tools and strategies work for people and how long it takes to feel better. Consider which of these approaches makes the most sense for you.

- Connect with others about your feelings to help get through a tough time. Talk to family, friends, coworkers, church members, other wildfire survivors and peer support groups.
- Think about other times when you had to cope with something difficult and what helped you then. Use those coping skills now.
- Seek support from professionals who are trained in dealing with what you are experiencing.
- If you are also experiencing other health issues, visit a doctor or clinic. Physical and mental health issues can be related to each other.
- Try self-care exercises like walking or exercising, eating well, meditation, deep breathing exercises, listening to music, or practicing a hobby or creative activity.

Be prepared for emotional distress around the event's anniversary and other triggers. Many people experience renewed feelings of fear, anxiety and sadness around the anniversary of a wildfire. Certain sounds, smells or sights can also take people back to the wildfire or trigger fear of it happening again. Mental health professionals can help you identify healthy coping strategies.

If your children are experiencing mental health challenges, look for resources that may help them within their school or community groups.

If you are having an emergency, dial 911.

RESOURCES

- » Suicide and Crisis Helpline: call or text 988. <https://beav.es/Szk>
- » Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990 or text "TalkWithUs" to 66746. <https://beav.es/Szi>
- » National Suicide Prevention Hotline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255) - press 1 for veterans, 2 for Spanish
- » David Romprey Oregon Warmline: 1-800-698-2392
- » National Substance Abuse Treatment” 1-800-662-HELP (4357) or <http://findtreatment.SAMHSA.gov>
- » For youth: Oregon YouthLine, <https://oregonyouthline.org>;
Teen-to-teen crisis line, text teen2teen to 839863 or 877-968-8431.
- » Mental health resources in Oregon, by county: <https://beav.es/SvE>
- » Survival Basics: Stress Less, <https://beav.es/Sva>
- » Mental health information for Latinx/Hispanic communities; the bottom of the page lists resources: <https://beav.es/SDt>
- » Oregon Wildfire Response and Recovery: 833-669-0554, <https://beav.es/SDv>



Want to learn more?

Discover the other chapters of this guide for more tips on how to prepare for a wildfire:

- ↘ Make a Plan
EM 9404-a
- ↘ Prepare Your Home
EM 9404-b
- ↘ Protect Yourself from Wildfire Smoke
EM 9404-d



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