

Planning for the Fire Season

Information for Parents

Dear Parents,

We are hoping that this summer we will have more rain and fewer fires than last summer. However, many children are also expressing some concern or anxiety about what may happen this year. If you or your children are experiencing fire season anxiety, here are a few key principles that may be helpful:

The most important thing to consider with anxiety is the feeling of Safety



- **Have a Plan**
- **Listen, Acknowledge, Reassure**
- **Build Resilience** – help children know that they are stronger than they think, that they are loved, and that they will be OK

For more information about these key principles, please see below:

Hope for the best, Plan for the worst

Kids (and adults too) do best if they have a plan and know what will happen. Having a plan gives some sense of predictability and safety to situations that are otherwise frightening and unpredictable. For this reason, one important way to alleviate anxiety is to make a plan about what your family will do if there is smoke or if there is a fire that requires evacuation.

Making a clear plan of what you will take with you, where you will go and how you will get there, and clearly communicating this to your kids will help them to know what to expect. This will give them some peace of mind – they will know that whatever happens, they will be safe.

Revisit this plan with them if they express worries. Let them know that even though you don't know what will happen, you know what you will do if there is a problem, and they are going to be OK.

For more information about fire planning and preparation information, please visit:

www.firesmartcanada.ca

Recognizing Anxiety

Fires and smoke are frightening. The experience of last summer was frightening and uncomfortable for many people. Put these together with anticipation of possibly having to experience the same thing again, and you are likely to see anxiety. If your children are experiencing anxiety you may see things like:

- Talking about worries. Asking questions about fires, smoke, evacuations, etc.
- Changes in behaviour, more moody, negative, “difficult”
- Changes in sleep
- Nightmares or bad dreams
- Stomach aches and headaches
- For some children, more quiet or withdrawn behaviour. For others, more hyperactivity.
- Changes in eating



Things you can do

- The biggest principal for anxiety management is that people need to have a **feeling of SAFETY**
- Help children **feel safe by making things predictable**:
 - Have a plan
 - Talk about the plan
 - Answer questions honestly, but focus on the plan and on the outcome of being safe. “It is going to be OK. We will be OK. We have a plan.”
- **To prepare for smoke**: Smoke can be a health concern and can cause anxiety, especially for people who have respiratory conditions.



Please check for up to date health information from:

<https://www.emergencyinfobc.gov.bc.ca> (search for “health” and click on “Protecting your health during wildfire season”)

Another informative website is: <http://www.bccdc.ca/health-professionals/professional-resources/wildfire-smoke-response-planning>

- **For anxiety of all types** and reasons, listen to children’s fears and worries and acknowledge their feelings, then:
 - Help children to remember their strengths by asking them to breathe slowly
 - Notice what they see and feel right now so they are grounded and present
 - Find the “I can do this, even though it is difficult” that is always present – even if there is also fear or anxiety

For instance:

“Yes, the smoke is unpleasant and uncomfortable and I know you are worried. We are going to stay inside today.

Also remember – it was difficult last year, but we did OK, and you did OK. Even if it is difficult again this year, we have a plan, we will figure it out, you are going to be OK and we are all going to be OK.”

If you would like more information about managing anxiety, go to www.anxietycanada.com and/or try the **mindshift app** on your phone. You can also check out the Sesame Street app called “Breathe,” which takes users through the steps of “Breathe, Think & Do.”

Remember: The most important thing to consider with anxiety is the **feeling of Safety**

- **Have a Plan**
- **Listen, Acknowledge, Reassure**
- **Build Resilience** – help children know that they are stronger than they think, that they are loved, and that they will be OK.

If you are concerned about your child, please contact your school counsellor or your community service provider.