

Supporting Your Children Through a Crisis: A Toolkit for Discussing Natural Disasters



Welcome

We hope that you, and those you care about are physically safe from the natural disaster. As you begin to rebuild and heal from this crisis, Harmony Academy is here to provide support and resources for you and your children's emotional well-being.

While children respond to crises in multiple ways, they often seek comfort from those around them. How can educators, parents, and caregivers reassure children during a crisis without creating unnecessary fear? We have compiled several resources to help guide you in reassuring children about their safety and well-being after the natural disaster. This toolkit is for adults across communities — educators, parents, caregivers, out-of-school-time staff — as they support their children.

How to Respond

- Reflect on and take care of your own emotions and well-being prior to your discussions.
- Use active listening skills and acknowledge children's feelings about the situation.
- Provide factual information about what is happening in age-appropriate language. It's okay if you do not have all the answers.
- Demonstrate calm behavior, as children often mimic adults' reactions. Promote open dialogue about fears and concerns among other supportive adults in your community, using the resources in this toolkit.

Please do not hesitate to reach out to harmony@nu.edu with any questions or feedback you may like to share about these resources.

Tools to Help Your Child in Response to a Crisis

Below we provide a variety of strategies, tools, and resources that you can use with your children to discuss and process the tragedy that has recently occurred due to the natural disaster. As you work through the recommendations that are most useful for you and your child(ren), remember that it is important to first pay attention to your own emotions and well-being about the natural disaster. This was a traumatic experience for you as well. As you use these tools, make sure to:

- Take time for yourself. Maybe it is a one-minute breathing exercise, journaling, physical exercise, or something else you need to help center yourself.
- Pay attention to your own emotions. You will have multiple emotions that come from this and that's okay. Take a moment to feel and understand those emotions.
- Notice your own reactions to your emotions and the situation. Your children will pay attention to how you respond, so make sure to consider helpful ways that you can respond to how you are feeling. Also, don't engage in a conversation with your children if you are experiencing big emotions.
- Use the strategies with your children. The strategies and tools below can be helpful for you as well. They can also help you build stronger connections with your children.
- Leverage your support network. You are not in this situation alone. There are family, friends, and neighbors who are experiencing something similar and are there to help you. Don't forget to ask for help.



MINDFUL MINUTE ACTIVITIES

When children have big emotions (e.g., feeling anxious, scared, nervous, frightened), Mindful Minute activities help you and your children get calm before talking about wildfires. Below are some examples of Mindful Minute activities. You can find additional options [here](#).

- Breathe in and then blow your breath out slowly, imagining the shape of an ice sculpture that your breath is creating in the air.
- Think about one thing you feel that makes you happy. Focus on picturing that thing in all of its details.
- Focus on tensing and then relaxing body parts one at a time—starting with the top of your scalp, and then moving down to your forehead, eyes, mouth, neck, shoulders, arms, fingers, legs, toes—until your entire body is relaxed.

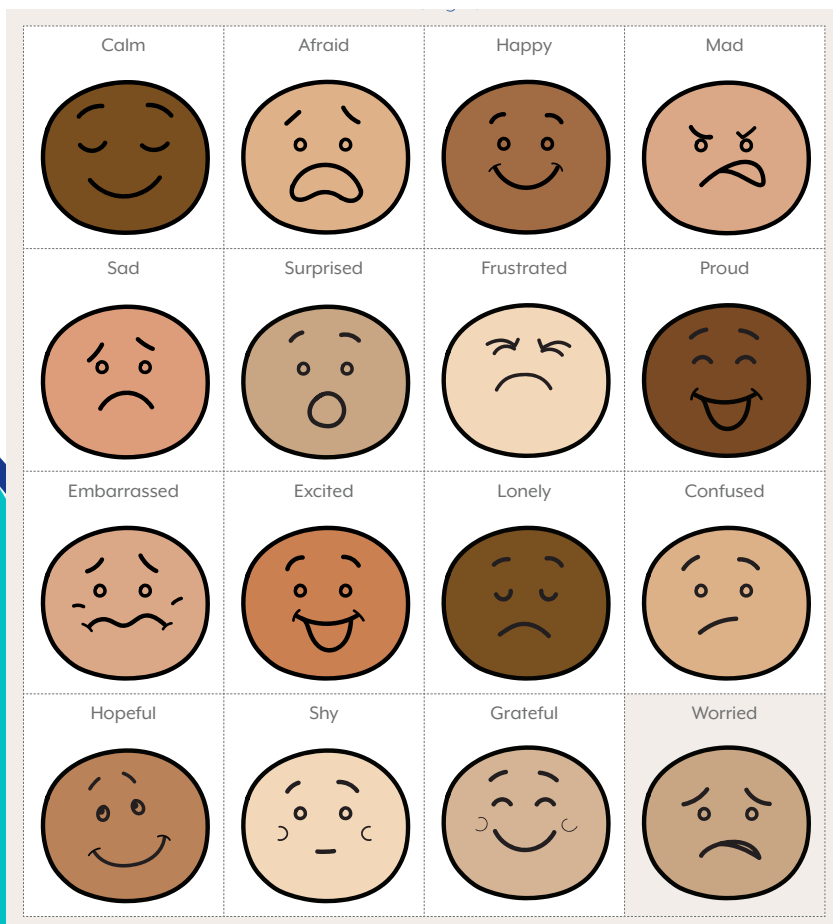
Talk About Emotions

Talk about emotions with your child. Talk about what clues they can look for to describe how they feel and how other people may feel. Discuss why people may feel differently right now during a crisis. Discuss or act out together what it looks, feels, and sounds like when they experience one emotion versus another. Following are some questions (adapted from our [Quick Connection Cards](#)) you might ask your children regarding how they feel about the wildfires:

- Why might you feel afraid about the natural disaster? What do you do normally to not be so afraid? How could you use that now?
- Why might you feel sad about the natural disaster? When you are feeling sad, what do you do to feel better? How could you use that now?
- You might be feeling down about the natural disaster. What cheers you up when you're feeling down? What do you think we could do together to feel better?
- The natural disaster may make us angry or sad, but we still have a lot to be thankful for. What are you thankful for now? How can we remember that?
- When we are sad or angry, it can be helpful to help others. What can we do now to help someone else?

When discussing emotions, you might share the [Feelings Faces Chart](#) and have your child reflect on how they're feeling and which face best represents where they're at in the moment.

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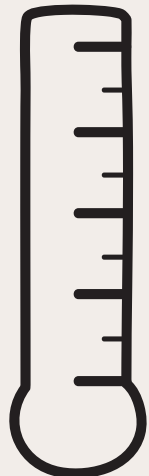
Cool-Off Strategies

Emotions can be big, or they can be mild. It is helpful to provide time for children to process how big their emotions are, particularly when thinking about a crisis like a natural disaster. Encourage your child to reflect on the intensity of their emotions about the natural disaster using the [Feelings Thermometer](#).

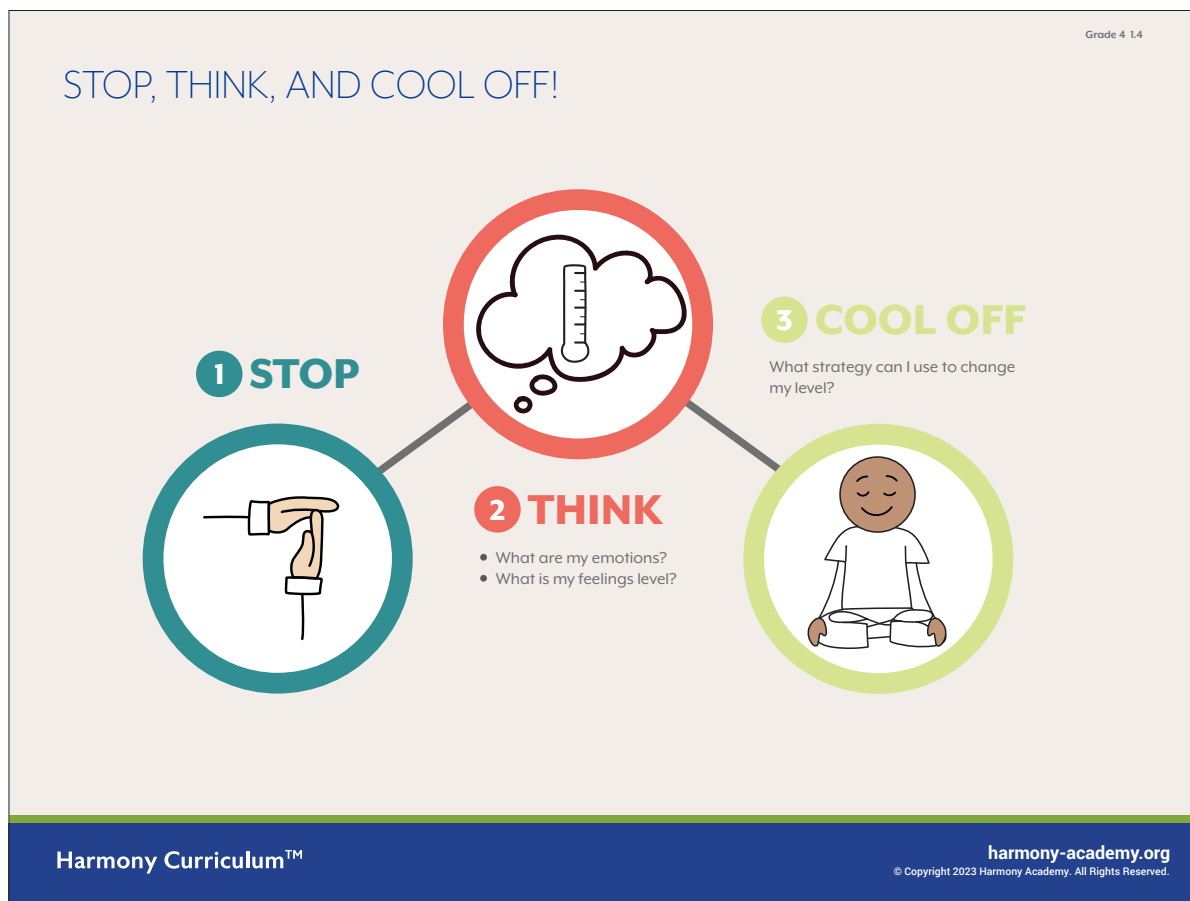
Explain that when emotions are at a Level 4 or 5 and feel very strong, it can be hard to express ourselves with words. During these moments, they can use the Stop, Think, and Cool-Off Strategy, which includes: "Stop" to hit pause; "Think" about their emotions; and then use a "Cool-Off Strategy." This might include taking a deep breath, counting backward from 10.

You can also choose from some of the suggestions below or in the [Relaxation Station](#) game on our website.

WHAT IS YOUR LEVEL?



Level 5	Very Strong
Level 4	Strong
Level 3	Medium
Level 2	Mild
Level 1	Very Mild



WAYS TO GET CALM

Grade 1 L4

Strategy #1:

Take ten deep breaths. After each breath, blow all of the air very slowly out. Pretend that you are blowing a big bubble.



Strategy #2:

Close your eyes. Lift your arms up over your head and then down in front of you. Slowly lift your arms up and down ten times.



Strategy #3:

Sit on the floor, criss-cross applesauce. Hug yourself. Rock slowly side to side ten times.



Strategy #4:

Think of a place that makes you happy. Picture details in your mind about this place. Whisper each detail to yourself, one at a time.



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Helpful Self-Talk

When a crisis happens, like a natural disaster, children may start engaging in unhelpful self-talk or convincing themselves that these sorts of things are very likely to happen again, and that they need to continue to worry. If your children are engaging in unhelpful self-talk, it is important to help them swap that unhelpful self-talk for helpful self-talk. In other words, help them process that this did happen but that you and your family will be able to get through this. You can use our [Helpful Self-Talk lesson](#) and guide for support:



- How is this thinking unhelpful?
- How might the thinker feel?



- Why did you pick that thought to swap in?
- How would it change the thinker's feelings?




Supporting Each Other

As you speak with your children about the crisis and the natural disaster, it's important to talk about how you can support one another as well as others who have experienced loss. You can utilize the [Supporting Others Poster](#), illustrating how we use our ears, eyes, mouth, and body to demonstrate active listening and support.


SUPPORTING OTHERS

Grade 3 3.1




EARS

- ✓ Listen for clues that someone might need help
- ✓ Listen to the concerns of others



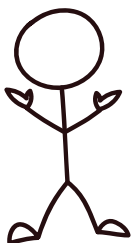
EYES

- ✓ Look for ways to encourage others
- ✓ Watch for situations where someone might need help



MOUTH

- ✓ Check in with others
- ✓ Answer questions
- ✓ Provide encouragement
- ✓ Ask others if they need help



BODY

- ✓ Lend a hand
- ✓ Help others when they are in need

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To help support your children and to help them support others, it is also important to help them share and respond to others about the natural disaster. These [Response Prompts](#) help you, your child, and others to share how they are feeling about the fires and acknowledge those feelings. To encourage elaboration, you can use response prompts like:

- Thank you for saying that, ____.
What you just said was important to me because ____.
- Please tell me more about ____.
- Is there more you'd like to share about ____.
- I think I heard you say _____. Is that right?



Empathy for Those Impacted

Helping your children show empathy and support to friends or classmates whom the natural disaster have impacted is also important. Explain that being aware of how other people feel can help us show others we care about them and value them, rather than trying to fix how they feel. You can do this through the following:



ADDITIONAL WELL-BEING ACTIVITIES

As you continue to heal and rebuild from the natural disaster, it is also important to continue to support your children's well-being. You can achieve this through multiple simple activities that you can engage in with your children. These sample activities come from our [Quick Connection Cards](#), Collaboration. [Note: In these examples, a "buddy" can be any child or adult paired up for the activity.]

[Early Childhood Examples:](#)

- **CREATE A RAINBOW** Draw a rainbow with your buddy using only primary colors (red, yellow, and blue).
- **HOW MANY CAN YOU NAME?** Work with your buddy to list as many types of desserts as you can.
- **SCAVENGER HUNT** Search the room with your buddy to find something that fits into a certain category (e.g., smooth, red, starts with the letter "d").
- **COPY CAT** Take turns creating a pattern of movements for your buddy to repeat (e.g., jump, wiggle, clap).
- **RHYME TIME** Work with your buddy to create a list of words that rhyme with _____.

[Upper Grade Examples:](#)

- **Backward Scattergories:** Make a list of items with your buddy that begin with the letter _____, and fall under a certain category (e.g., animals, fruit, places).
- **Hokey Handshake:** Make up a handshake with your buddy.
- **Trust Walk:** Verbally guide your buddy across the room while they are blindfolded or have their eyes closed, then switch turns.
- **Backward ABCs:** Write the letters of the alphabet backward on a shared piece of paper, alternating turns with your buddy.
- **The Scooby Doo:** Talk with your buddy for a minute and put an 'R' in front of every word (e.g., "Rhi. Rhow Rare Ryou?").

MORE RESOURCES

- [Supporting Infants and Young Children Around Floods](#) from AIMHiTN
- [Floods](#) from CLDR
- [Floods](#) from ChildAware.org
- [Helping Children Cope with Disaster](#) from FEMA
- [Prepare with Pedro: Flood](#) from ready.gov/kids
- [Hill Country flooding: here's how to give and receive help](#) from TexasTribune.org
- [How to talk to kids about scary or tragic events in the news](#) from Connecticut Children's
- [Tips for talking to children and youth after traumatic events](#) from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

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