

# WHAT TO DO AFTER A DISASTER



**MONTEREY COUNTY  
OFFICE OF EMERGENCY SERVICES**

**This toolkit is part of a 3-packet series created by Monterey County Office of Emergency Services to inform the public about disaster mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery. The toolkit series is part of the Community Resilience Project. Learn more about the project and view Monterey County's Disaster Resource Directory at [www.co.monterey.ca.us/resilience](http://www.co.monterey.ca.us/resilience)**

1. [General Emergency Preparedness Toolkit](#)
1. [Kit de herramientas de preparación general para emergencias en](#)
2. [Managing Different Disasters](#)
3. [Manejo de Diferentes Desastres](#)
4. [What to do After a Disaster](#)
4. [Qué Hacer Después de un Desastre](#)

# IMMEDIATELY AFTER ANY DISASTER, YOU SHOULD:

*Your first job is to protect your safety, only then can you help others. After an emergency:*

## STEP ONE

CHECK YOURSELF & OTHERS FOR INJURIES

- ✓ Check on neighbors, especially seniors and the disabled.
- ✓ Treat minor injuries and seek medical assistance for serious injuries.
- ✓ If you lost a pet, call the SPCA at 831-264-5400

*Proceed with caution, stay alert and remember that other emergencies and hazards can follow*

## STEP TWO

PROCEED WITH CAUTION

- ✓ Use caution when exiting or entering a building and opening cabinets
- ✓ If possible, put on long pants/sleeves, sturdy shoes & other protective wear
- ✓ Watch for and avoid damaged buildings, roads, bridges, overpasses, downed power lines, fleeing wildlife, and other hazards.

## STEP THREE

ADDRESS HAZARDS

- ✓ Inspect buildings and power, gas, and water lines for damage.
- ✓ If you smell gas or rotten eggs, leave immediately and call 911 & your utility provider.
- ✓ If you find a wild animal in need, don't move it. Contact the SPCA at 831-264-5427.
- ✗ DON'T put yourself in danger, if there is damage or you're in doubt regarding your safety, leave the area and call 911.

*Return to the area only when authorities say it's safe.*

## STEP FOUR

INSPECT AND DOCUMENT

- ✓ Start a list of damaged belongings and document damage with photographs
- ✓ Throw out nonperishable food and medicine that wasn't properly stored
- ✓ Before beginning clean up and repairs, contact your insurance provider.
- ✓ Check in with your county, state, and/or federal emergency management agencies/offices/departments or a local assistance center, if one is established, for available recovery assistance, debris removal programs, and additional information on clean up and repairs. You can also call 2-1-1 for assistance finding resources
- ✓ Be sure to take care of yourself: Rest when you need to, prioritize tasks, work with other people, and get support from loved ones and/or professionals when you need it.

## STEP FIVE

CLEAN UP, REBUILD, AND RECOVER

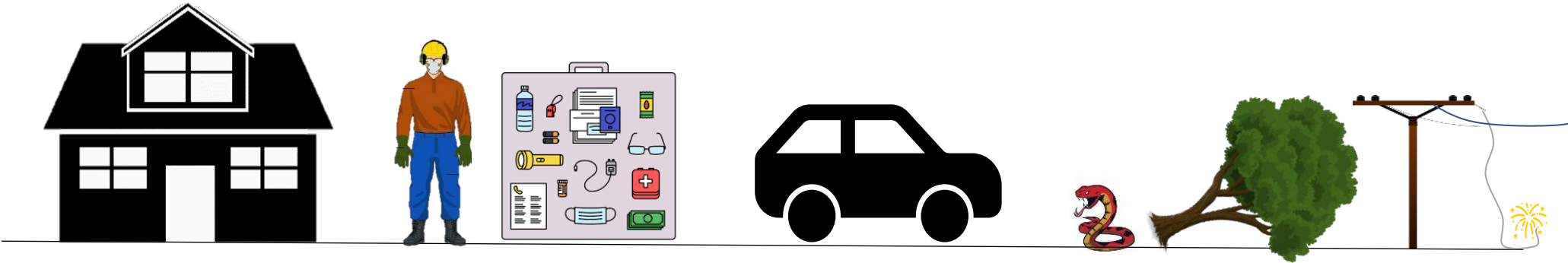
- ! If you decide to hire a contractor, make sure to watch for scams. Learn more: [www.consumerfinance.gov/ask-cfpb/](http://www.consumerfinance.gov/ask-cfpb/)

Learn more about safely recovering from disasters, read the sections below & visit: [www.cdc.gov/disasters/illness-injury.html](http://www.cdc.gov/disasters/illness-injury.html)

# RETURNING HOME AFTER EVACUATING

## RETURN HOME DURING THE DAYTIME AND ONLY AFTER AUTHORITIES SAY IT IS SAFE.

Expect hazards and utility disruption, proceed with caution, and be prepared to leave again, if officials tell you to.



### BEFORE RETURNING

- ☎ **Inform loved ones** before you leave & when you arrive.
- 🛢 **Fill up gas tanks and fully charge phones.**
- ✓ **Get plenty of rest and eat a good meal before leaving.**
- ✓ **Avoid bringing children and pets** on the first trip back home.
- ✓ **Check road conditions and routes before leaving**, call 511 or visit the following webpage:
  - ☐ [CHP Traffic Information](#)
  - ☐ [Monterey County Public Works - Road Conditions](#)
  - ☐ [Caltrans Quick Maps](#)

### WHAT TO BRING

- ☐ **Food and Water**
- ☐ **Camera/Phone**
- ☐ **Protective Clothes** (sturdy boots, long sleeve shirts, pants, helmet, safety goggles, dust mask, work gloves)
- ☐ **Flashlight & Whistle**
- ☐ **Portable Radio**
- ☐ **Portable Charger & Extra Batteries**
- ☐ **Proof of Residency** (Anything that shows your address)

### WHAT TO KNOW:

- ! **There may be limited access** to some areas impacted by disasters. Access to these areas may be controlled at Re-Entry Points.
- ! **Be prepared to leave again** if officials tell you to.
- ! **Expect delays** and practice patience at the entry points.
- ! **Expect hazards** and be aware of your surroundings and changing conditions.
- ! **Water may not be safe to drink** and there may be a boil water notice in place.

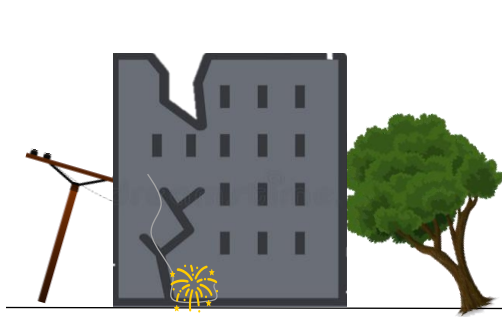
### ON THE WAY HOME

- ⚠ **Watch for, avoid, and notify authorities & others about hazards** (ex. wild animals, damaged roads/building, downed power lines, broken glass, flooding).
- ⚠ **If you find a wild animal in need**, don't touch, capture, or move it. Contact [SPCA Wildlife center](#) at **831-264-5427**.
- ⚠ **If you see downed power lines** near your home, treat them as if they are "live" or energized. Keep yourself and others away from them. Call 911, then notify PG&E at **800-743-5000**.
- ⚠ If power lines fall on your vehicle **stay inside the car, call 911, and warn others to stay away.**





# RETURNING HOME AFTER EVACUATING

**NEVER ENTER A BUILDING IF YOU DOUBT IT'S SAFETY, SMELL GAS/ROTTEN EGGS, OR SEE DAMAGE OR FLOODING.**





Call a building professional, your local jurisdiction, or FEMA to inspect before entering. To find resources, call 2-1-1.










## BEFORE ENTERING YOUR HOME:

-  **Walk carefully around the outside.** Check for structural damage, roof, chimney, or foundation cracks, door jams, loose power lines, & gas leaks.
-  **Use extreme caution around tall objects or structures** that may have lost stability, such as trees and power lines.
-  **Keep your radio, whistle, flashlight, and cell phone on you** in case of emergencies.
-  **DO NOT turn on lights/flashlights or spark matches/lighters indoors until verifying there is no gas leak or electrical issues.**

## WHEN ENTERING YOUR HOME:

-  **Enter carefully,** open cabinets and doors with caution and watch for hazards (slippery floors, broken glass, loose boards, wild animals)
-  **Sniff for gas leaks. Leave the property immediately if you detect the odor of gas or hear a hissing noise,** opening windows and doors on the way out. Call the local fire department (911) and PG&E (800-743-5000)
-  **If you encounter an animal in your home, provide an escape route for it.** If it does not leave on its own, call 831-264-5427.
-  **If the house has been closed up for several days, enter briefly to open doors and windows** (at least 30 minutes) before you stay for any length of time.

## MANAGING UTILITIES

-  **Shutoff damaged gas, power, and water lines** as needed. If in doubt contact your utility provider.
-  **Check the electrical system** for sparks, breaks, or frayed wires.
-  **If the electricity is off,** check appliances for damage and unplug them before turning electrical systems back on.
-  **Check your water system for damage.** The sound of air escaping a faucet or water intermittently spurting out indicates a loss of water pressure.
-  **Don't use water until you check with local authorities to ensure it is safe.**
-  **Don't flush toilets** until verifying sewage lines are intact
-  **If your gas was turned off,** contact your gas company to turn it back on.

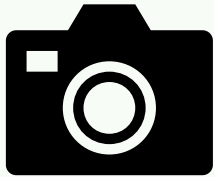
***After ensuring your home is safe and free of hazards, begin documenting and photographing all damages.***

***Read below to learn about the steps you will need to take as you begin to recover from the disaster.***

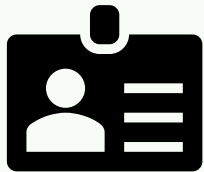
# FINANCIAL RECOVERY

**AFTER YOU RETURN HOME, INSPECT YOUR PROPERTY, AND MANAGE ANY HAZARDS, YOU SHOULD:**

## #1 DOCUMENT ALL DAMAGES TO YOUR PROPERTY



## #2 REPLACE CRITICAL DOCUMENTS



Find resources on how to replace critical documents that may have been misplaced, damaged, or destroyed during the disaster by going to a local assistance center or visiting: [www.usa.gov/replace-vital-documents](http://www.usa.gov/replace-vital-documents)

## #3 CONTACT YOUR INSURANCE COMPANY TO REPORT DAMAGES



*Make sure to write down the name of the person you speak to and the claim number they give you.*

If you have any insurance policy that may cover your damage, report your loss as soon as possible. Learn more about managing insurance policies during and after disasters: [www.insurance.ca.gov/01-consumers/140-catastrophes/](http://www.insurance.ca.gov/01-consumers/140-catastrophes/)

## #4 LEARN ABOUT LOCAL ASSISTANCE AND REGULATIONS



Learn about local regulations and guidance for waste management and building repairs and check out resources available to assist with debris removal and repairs/rebuilding.

Local Assistance Centers (LAC) may open to provide a one stop shop for disaster survivors to replace documents, get information, learn about resources, and apply for assistance. Call 2-1-1 or visit [Monterey County Office of Emergency Services Website](http://Monterey County Office of Emergency Services Website) after a disaster, to see if a LAC has opened in your area.

Learn about FEMA recovery resources: <https://www.disasterassistance.gov/>



**#5 BEGIN CLEAN UP AND REPAIRS ONLY AFTER TAKING THE STEPS ABOVE. MAKE SURE TO YOU DOCUMENT ALL CLEAN UP AND REPAIR COSTS**

# FINANCIAL RECOVERY



## UNABLE TO LIVE IN HOME DUE TO DISASTER RELATED DAMAGE

**Ask the insurance company if it will pay for living expenses,** such as a motel, food, and laundry and if this payment will reduce the amount you ultimately receive for damages to your property or possessions.

**Notify the utility company and other service companies,** such as the phone company, so they can stop billing immediately. Often, a utility company will transfer service to a new address and waive initial connection charges.

**Disaster damages may impact your current rental lease.** For example, if you lease a property that is destroyed, this usually terminates the lease with no further liability on the part of the renter or landlord.

Learn more:

[www.tenantstogether.org/resources](http://www.tenantstogether.org/resources)



## DISASTER IMPACTS TO INCOME

### Lost your job or salary?

You may be eligible for [unemployment insurance](#) or [disaster unemployment assistance](#). Learn more at <https://edd.ca.gov/> or 800-300-5616.

### Was your business impacted?

Business owners impacted by a disaster may qualify for SBA assistance, visit [www.sba.gov/](http://www.sba.gov/) for more info. Businesses are also encouraged to contact the local [Small Business Development Center](#) [Women's Business Center](#) [Community Foundation](#) [Workforce Development Board](#) and/or community business groups (ex. [Chambers of Commerce](#) or the [Monterey County Business Council](#)) for assistance ideas and options.

### Unable to pay bills?

**Talk to your creditors/lenders as soon as possible about delaying or modifying your payments.** You may be able to skip some loan payments without it counting against your credit history. You may also be able to extend the terms of your loan and/or restructure loans.

**If your mortgage is financed by the Federal Farmer's Home Administration (FMHA) or insured by the Federal Housing Administration (FHA),** you may have special rights if behind in your payments because of circumstances beyond your control.

**In a presidentially declared emergency,** foreclosures on affected properties are put on hold for 90 days.



## TAX TIPS

Insurance used to repair or replace property are usually tax free; however, reimbursements for living expenses may be taxable.

**You may be eligible for tax refunds, deductions, or other benefits due to lost or damaged possessions or property.** In general, losses are deductible if, in one year, they total more than \$100 and more than 10 percent of your adjusted gross income. You cannot deduct losses that are covered by insurance or emergency aid assistance. Learn about tax deductions for disaster losses: [www.ftb.ca.gov/file/business/deductions/disaster-loss.html](http://www.ftb.ca.gov/file/business/deductions/disaster-loss.html)



## IF YOUR BANK IS DESTROYED

Your money is still insured by the [Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation \(FDIC\)](#) for up to \$250,000. Keep financial records that you have in case your account needs to be reconstructed. Deposit insurance does not cover safe deposit box contents. Contact your bank branch where your box was located to determine the condition of what you had stored.

# CLEANING UP AND REBUILDING AFTER A DISASTER

## TIPS FOR CONDUCTING CLEAN UP AND REPAIRS

- ✓ **DOCUMENT DAMAGES & CONTACT YOUR INSURANCE AND CITY/COUNTY BEFORE STARTING CLEAN UP AND REPAIRS.** There may be debris removal programs available, waste management procedures you need to follow, and permits needed to conduct repairs.
- ✓ **WEAR PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT:** N-95 respirator, goggles, closed toe sturdy shoes, pants and long-sleeved shirt, and gloves.
- ✓ **PACE YOURSELF.** Set priorities and make sure you are getting enough rest.
- ✓ **KEEP GOOD RECORDS OF REPAIR AND CLEANING COSTS.**



### CLEAN SPILLS/MUD AND DISINFECT CONTAMINATED ITEMS

If items contaminated by raw sewage, floodwater, bacteria, or chemicals can't be disinfected, throw them away.



**COVER BROKEN WINDOWS AND HOLES** in the roof or walls to prevent further damage.



## TIPS FOR CLEANING UP



Remember that hazardous waste, electronics, debris, and garbage will need to be separated and disposed of differently. Contact Monterey County Environmental Health to learn how to properly dispose of different types of waste: [www.co.monterey.ca.us/government/departments-and-health/environmental-health/](http://www.co.monterey.ca.us/government/departments-and-health/environmental-health/)



### THROW OUT FOOD THAT WASN'T PROPERLY STORED OR CAME IN CONTACT WITH FLOODWATER, FIRE, OR HAZARDOUS MATERIALS.

For questions on food safety call USDA's Hotline at 800-535-4555



**AVOID USING MEDICINE THAT HASN'T BEEN PROPERLY STORED OR WAS CONTAMINATED.** Contact your healthcare provider about replacing medicine. Learn more about drug safety during disasters at [www.fda.gov/drugs/emergency-preparedness-drugs/](http://www.fda.gov/drugs/emergency-preparedness-drugs/)



**ISOLATE OR COVER HARMFUL MATERIALS** such as bleach, lye, paint, garden chemicals and gasoline with an absorbent (ex. dirt or cat litter). Remember that some cleaning solutions can cause toxic fumes and other hazards if combined.

**If you smell a strong odor or your eyes water from the fumes or mixed chemicals, open a window, exit your home, and call 911.**

Learn more about clean up post disaster: [www.cdc.gov/disasters/cleanup/index.html](http://www.cdc.gov/disasters/cleanup/index.html)

# HIRING CONTRACTORS FOR CLEAN UP AND REPAIRS

Make sure you plan before you begin repairs. Contact your local building inspections, planning office, or clerk's office to get information on local building requirements ([Monterey County Housing and Community Development](#) for Unincorporated areas).



## TIPS FOR HIRING A CONTRACTOR

- ✓ **GET MULTIPLE ESTIMATES** from several licensed, bonded, reputable contractors.
- ✓ **ASK FOR REFERENCES, & PROOF OF INSURANCE, NECESSARY LICENSES AND BUILDING PERMITS.**
  - Write down the license plate number and driver's license number of any person offering services in case you need to report a problem later.
  - Call your local [Better Business Bureau](#) or state contractors' board to check out contractors you are considering and find out if complaints have been filed against them.
  - Call the insuring and licensing company to verify that the policy is active and that the appropriate license is current.
- ✓ **HAVE A WRITTEN CONTRACT IN PLACE BEFORE WORK BEGINS**
  - Thoroughly review contracts before signing - have an attorney review it if possible.
  - Contracts should cover the scope of work, timeline, materials, costs, payment schedule, and recourse for incomplete or unacceptable work.
- ✓ **MAKE PERIODIC PAYMENTS AND DON'T PAY IN FULL UNTIL THE JOB IS FINISHED TO YOUR SATISFACTION AND PASSED FINAL CITY OR COUNTY BUILDING INSPECTIONS**
  - If a contractor asks for a deposit or full payment in cash, stop. That's a warning sign that something's not right
  - If a contractor insists on a materials payment up front, go with him or her to buy the materials or pay the supplier directly.
  - Have contractors and subcontractors sign a release of lien when the work is finished and paid for, protecting you from any later claims for unpaid materials and labor.



## AVOID SCAMS:

- ✓ Verify the identity of anyone trying to sell you something or asking for money,
- ✓ Be wary of offers that sound too good to be true.
- ✓ Ask questions and resist pressure to make quick or uninformed financial decisions.

Learn more- [www.consumerfinance.gov/ask-cfpb/how-do-i-recognize-and-prevent-against-fraud-after-a-natural-disaster-en-1529/](http://www.consumerfinance.gov/ask-cfpb/how-do-i-recognize-and-prevent-against-fraud-after-a-natural-disaster-en-1529/).

## WATCH FOR PRICE GOUGING

Price gouging is the practice of taking advantage of disaster victims by substantially raising the prices for needed goods or services without justification. Learn more: <https://oag.ca.gov/consumers/pricegougingduringdisasters>

**If you believe price gouging is occurring, call California' Attorney General's Office at 800-952-5225.**

Learn more about hiring a contractor post disaster: [https://cslb.ca.gov/Media\\_Room/Disaster\\_Help\\_Center/](https://cslb.ca.gov/Media_Room/Disaster_Help_Center/)

# TIPS FOR FLOOD CLEAN UP AND REPAIRS



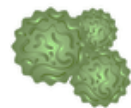
## DRY OUT YOUR HOME

- ✓ If weather permits, open windows and doors of the house to aid in the drying-out process.
- ✓ Fans should be placed at a window or door to blow the air outwards rather than inwards, so not to spread the mold.
- ✓ Instead of breaking glass or forcing open swollen windows, remove the molding and take the window sash out of its frame.
- ✓ Completely dry all electrical equipment and appliances before returning them to service. Have a certified electrician check these items if there is any question.



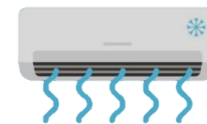
## IF YOUR BASEMENT HAS FLOODED, PUMP IT OUT GRADUALLY (ABOUT ONE THIRD OF THE WATER PER DAY) TO AVOID DAMAGE.

The walls may collapse, and the floor may buckle if the basement is pumped out while the surrounding ground is still full of water.



## IF YOUR HOME HAS BEEN FLOODED AND HAS BEEN CLOSED UP FOR SEVERAL DAYS, ASSUME YOUR HOME HAS MOLD.

- ✓ Consider hiring a certified mold inspection or remediation professional.
- ✓ If you choose to conduct clean up on your own, use caution and wear protective gear over skin, eyes, mouth, and nose.
- ✓ Ensure the mold cleanup is complete before reoccupying your home.



## HAVE YOUR HOME HEATING, VENTILATING, AND AIR-CONDITIONING (HVAC) SYSTEM CHECKED AND CLEANED BEFORE YOU TURN IT ON.

If the HVAC system was flooded with water, turning on the mold-contaminated HVAC will spread mold throughout the house.

## ⚠ CAUTION

**IF YOUR HOME WAS BUILT BEFORE 1978, BEFORE YOU REMOVE WET CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS**, like wallboard or ceiling and floor tiles, take care to avoid problems with airborne asbestos and lead dust that can be lethal.

- For information on avoiding exposure to **asbestos** - contact the US EPA's Toxic Substance Control Act hotline at 202-554-1404 or [tsca-hotline@epa.gov](mailto:tsca-hotline@epa.gov)
- For information on avoiding exposure to **lead** - contact the [National Lead Information Center](#) at 800-424-LEAD (5323).

More information on cleaning up and repairing your home after a flood:  
[www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/resources-flood-cleanup-and-indoor-air-quality](http://www.epa.gov/indoor-air-quality-iaq/resources-flood-cleanup-and-indoor-air-quality)

# TIPS FOR FIRE CLEAN UP AND REPAIRS



## 1. ASSESS THE DAMAGE

The first step to recovery after a wildfire is assessing the damage. Just like any other disaster, you should document and photograph all damages prior to beginning clean up and repairs.

In addition, Monterey County [Building Services](#) and [Environmental Health](#) and [local fire agencies](#) will conduct initial damage assessments to understand the burn severity and damage caused by a wildfire to a property. This information can help with insurance claims and may help qualify you for government run recovery and debris removal programs.

***DO NOT begin cleanup and repairs until a damage assessment is complete.***



## 2. SAFELY DISPOSE OF BURN DEBRIS AND HAZARDOUS WASTE

Burn debris, ashes, and hazardous waste, including products, such as paints, cleaners, oils, batteries, and pesticides, can contain toxic substances and require special care for disposal.

- ! Burn debris and ash cannot be disposed of in residential or commercial trash collection bins.
- ! DO NOT touch or dispose of burn debris and ash until it has been tested. Failure to follow required removal procedures can jeopardize financial assistance and delay rebuilding.

Contact [Monterey County Environmental Health](#) or your local waste management agency for specific instruction on how to manage waste and debris

Learn more about recovering after a wildfire at [www.co.monterey.ca.us/government/departments-a-h/health/environmental-health/general/recovering-after-a-wildfire](http://www.co.monterey.ca.us/government/departments-a-h/health/environmental-health/general/recovering-after-a-wildfire)



## 3. REDUCE IMPACTS OF FUTURE HAZARDS

***Regions impacted by wildfire are at increased risk of flooding, landslides, debris flows and mudslides for years after the fire.***

- ✓ When conducting repairs, consider taking steps to mitigate against future hazards, such as rebuilding with fire resistant material, elevating your home, and modifying your property's landscape. Learn more in the [Managing Different Disasters Toolkit](#).
- ✓ Before starting landscape, slope or soil restoration on areas with wildfire damage, consult with the Natural Resources Conservation Service, the Resource Conservation District of Monterey County and/or a private land restoration consultant. Learn more: [www.co.monterey.ca.us/home/showdocument?id=95659](http://www.co.monterey.ca.us/home/showdocument?id=95659)



# MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING AND RECOVERY

As you work through clean up, rebuilding and recovery after a disaster, remember to take steps to avoid stress and mentally and emotionally recover from the experience. Remember that disasters can have more than just physical and material impacts; they can cause long term mental health impacts. These problems can occur long after the disaster has taken place and, when not addressed, can worsen.



## REDUCE STRESS DURING RECOVERY

Remember, stress can impact your mind and emotions, make it more difficult to function, and cause physical problems, such as headaches, body aches, digestion problems, changes in appetite, and rashes. Taking care of yourself and managing stress is the best way to ensure the quickest and least difficult path to recovery.

1. **PACE YOURSELF.** Set priorities to accomplish the most important tasks first; plan a reasonable amount of activity each day.
2. **TAKE BREAKS.** Make time to unwind and do activities you usually enjoy.
3. **TAKE CARE OF YOUR BODY.** Try to eat healthy well-balanced meals, exercise regularly, and get plenty of sleep. Avoid alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs.
4. **LIMIT VIEWING OF THE INCIDENT.** People can become more distressed if they see repeated images of a disaster in the media.



## RECOGNIZE & MANAGE FEELINGS

Bottling up feelings and thoughts restricts your ability to work through what happened and cope with the pain. Find a healthy way of working through your feelings, such as talking with a trusted person or professional, writing, or drawing.

1. **Connect with others.** Maintain healthy relationships and build a strong support system. Stay in touch with your religious/spiritual leader, social groups, neighbors, family, and friends.
2. **Express yourself.** Use hobbies, such as writing, singing, or playing sports, to help you recognize and work through your thoughts and emotions.
3. **Seek help when needed.** If you find it hard to function or cope with your feelings for several days or weeks, talk to a clergy member, counselor, or doctor, or contact the [SAMHSA helpline](#) at **800-985-5990**.



## TAKE BACK YOUR POWER

Disasters often leave us feeling helpless and powerless, but we are not! We can't always prevent emergencies or recover our losses, but we can learn from the experiences and become better prepared and more resilient as a result.

1. **Try to return to your pre disaster routines as quickly as possible.** Routines give you something predictable to depend upon.
2. **Get involved.** Your voice is important in deciding how your community will rebuild in the years to come. Include children and teens in recovery activities and perform random acts of kindness, volunteering or donating when possible.
3. **Prepare for possible future emergencies** to lessen feelings of helplessness and bring peace of mind.
4. **Check in on others.** Regularly check in on family members, those you provide care for, and neighbors during and after an emergency.

# MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING AND RECOVERY



## WHEN TO SEEK HELP



- ! You are overwhelmed by long-lasting grief, sadness, or worry.
- ! You can't get restful sleep, or you sleep too much (to the point where it impacts your daily life).
- ! You find yourself being unusually hostile or behaving violently.
- ! You are misusing alcohol or drugs.
- ! Your personal care and cleanliness decline.
- ! You get no pleasure from things you used to enjoy.
- ! You see or hear things that aren't real.
- ! Your mood swings wildly from depressed to very high energy.
- ! You have panic attacks with chest pain and trouble breathing.
- ! You have flashbacks of a traumatic event.
- ! You have intrusive thoughts you cannot control.
- ! You feel numb or disconnected from life.
- ! You find yourself thinking about suicide or self-harm.



## WHERE TO SEEK HELP



### Monterey County Behavioral Health

[www.co.monterey.ca.us/government/departments-and-health/behavioral-health/bh-home](http://www.co.monterey.ca.us/government/departments-and-health/behavioral-health/bh-home)

### CDC guide to coping post disaster

<https://emergency.cdc.gov/coping/index.asp>

### Red Cross guide to coping post disaster

<https://www.ready.gov/coping-with-disaster>

### Helping children cope with disasters

[www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/helping-children-cope.html](http://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/helping-children-cope.html)

### Stress & nonclinical mental health support:

[tp://nationsfinestwildfiresupportmontereycounty.eventbrite.com](http://nationsfinestwildfiresupportmontereycounty.eventbrite.com)

831-295-5779

### Bereavement Support

[www.co.monterey.ca.us/home/showdocument?id=71575](http://www.co.monterey.ca.us/home/showdocument?id=71575)

### SAMHSA Disaster Distress Helpline

[www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline](http://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/disaster-distress-helpline)

1-800-985-5990

1-800-749-COPE (1-800 749-2673)

1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)

### Substance abuse assistance

<https://www.samhsa.gov/find-help/national-helpline>

1-888-258-6029

# HELPING CHILDREN COPE WITH EMERGENCIES

The damage and loss that can result from emergencies may be difficult for children to understand and they can have a hard time expressing emotions. How children react to emergencies is dependent on the child's personality, age, and experience, the support they have from their family and community and the characteristics of the emergency (how much damage it caused, if it was unexpected, etc.). Difficult feelings can create difficult behaviors, which may appear right away, be triggered by certain sights or noises (ex. sirens) or take some time to manifest, but, when properly addressed, they usually ease with time.

## AFTER AN EMERGENCY, CHILDREN MAY HAVE:



**FEAR OR WORRY.**  
They may become afraid to leave the home or parents.



**PHYSICAL PAIN**  
Negative emotions can develop into physical symptoms (ex. stomachaches, headaches, etc.)



**CHANGES IN APPETITE, SLEEP OR COMMUNICATION**  
Talk/eat/sleep more or less than usual, nightmares, etc.



**DIFFICULTY THINKING**  
Distracted, unable to focus, grades dropping in school, etc.



**DISRUPTIVE BEHAVIOR**  
Acting younger than their age (ex. wetting the bed), reckless driving, fighting, tantrums, drug use, etc.

Often what children and teenagers need most is to have someone they trust listen to their questions, accept their feelings, and be there for them. Give children the opportunity to discuss the experience if they want to, this can help them better understand and cope with it. Don't worry about knowing the perfect thing to say – there is no answer that will make everything okay, just try to provide honest answers and reassurance at the level of the child's understanding.

## RESOURCES TO HELP CHILDREN COPE WITH EMERGENCIES:

### WEBSITES

- Administration for Children and Families: [www.acf.hhs.gov/](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/)
- American Academy of Pediatrics: <https://www.aap.org/>
- Child Welfare Information Gateway: <https://www.childwelfare.gov/>
- Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration: [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov)
- Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator: [www.samhsa.gov/find-treatment](http://www.samhsa.gov/find-treatment)
- Support for Grieving Students: [grievingstudents.org](http://grievingstudents.org)
- Helping Children and Adolescents Cope with Traumatic Events:
  - Brochure: [English](#) - [Spanish](#)
  - Website: [www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/helping-children-cope.html](http://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/helping-children-cope.html)
- National Child Trauma Stress Network: [www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/](http://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/)
- National Center for School Crisis and Bereavement: [SchoolCrisisCenter.org](http://SchoolCrisisCenter.org)
- US Dept of Health & Human Services: [www.mentalhealth.gov](http://www.mentalhealth.gov)

### PHONE NUMBERS

- National Center for School Crisis & Bereavement: 1-877-536-2722
- Mental Health Treatment Facility Locator: 1-800-789-2647  
1-866-889-2647 (TTY)
- Substance Abuse Treatment Facility Locator: 1-800-662-HELP (4357)  
1-800-487-4889 (TTY)
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-TALK (8255)  
1-800-799-4TTY (4889) (TTY)
- Disaster Distress Helpline: 1-800-985-5990,  
Text "TalkWithUs" to 66746
- Child Welfare Information Gateway: 1-800-4-A-CHILD (2-24453)

# HELPING CHILDREN COPE WITH EMERGENCIES

After an emergency, you can help your children cope by:

## PROVIDING COMFORT



- ✓ **BE PATIENT AND STAY CALM.** When parents deal with emergencies calmly and confidently, they can provide the best support for children.
- ✓ **REASSURE CHILDREN.** Let them know they are safe but don't say disasters will never affect your family again; Instead, say "You're safe now and I'll always try to protect you," or "Adults are working very hard to make things safe."
- ✓ **BE PRESENT:** Check in often, spend more time together, explain where you're going when you leave, provide physical comfort (ex. hugs), etc.
- ✓ **RE-ESTABLISH COMFORTING ROUTINES.** Resume normal functions as soon as possible but relax your expectations of children. Try to replace lost toys and comfort items
- ✓ **SET A GOOD EXAMPLE BY TAKING CARE OF YOURSELF:** Eat healthy, exercise regularly, get plenty of sleep, and avoid drugs and alcohol.

## ALLOWING CHILDREN TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES



- ✓ **INVITE CHILDREN TO DISCUSS THEIR EXPERIENCES.** Younger children may find it easier to talk about other children's experiences in the emergency; they may also ask questions over and over because they do not understand it. For example, younger children may not understand the permanence of death. Older children might find benefit from group discussions, especially with peers.
- ✓ **MAKE YOURSELF AVAILABLE TO TALK, BUT DON'T FORCE THEM TO TALK.**
- ✓ **LET CHILDREN KNOW THEIR FEELINGS ARE OKAY.** Let children know that it is okay to feel afraid, sad, or worried and talk about ways they can cope with their feelings (ex. talking with others, writing about it, etc.)
- ✓ **EMPOWER CHILDREN TO EXPRESS THEMSELVES THROUGH MULTIPLE CHANNELS.** Support children spending time with friends, having quiet time to write or create art, and getting involved in recovery efforts. You can also structure children's play so that it remains constructive, serving as an outlet for them to express fear or anger.
- ✓ **GIVE CHILDREN SOME POWER.** Give them tasks that they can safely get done to empower them. While many things will be out of their control, point out those things they are still in control of and allow them control over simple things such as what to wear, what to eat, or what bed to sleep in.

## BEING AWARE AND SEEKING HELP WHEN NEEDED



- ✓ **MONITOR CHILDREN'S MEDIA & INTERNET VIEWING.** Images of the disaster and the damage can be extremely frightening to children, so consider limiting the amount of media coverage they see. You can do this by scheduling activities (ex. reading, drawing, movies, etc.) during news shows. When older children watch TV, try to watch with them and use the opportunity to discuss what is being seen and how it makes you and your child feel.
- ✓ **TALK TO SCHOOLS AND OTHER CARE PROVIDERS.** Parents, teachers, and other adults see children in different situations, it is important for them to work together to share information about how each child is coping after a traumatic event.
- ✓ **SEEK HELP IF PROBLEMS PERSIST.** You may wish to speak with a teacher, counselor, pediatrician, or member of the clergy for advice. Following a trauma, many adults and children have found that it is helpful to talk with a counselor who has specialized training in posttraumatic reactions and can help them understand and deal with how they are feelings; this does not mean the child is "mentally ill" or that parents have failed to support them.



**RESILIENT MONTEREY COUNTY**

**For more information on recovering from disasters, visit:**

[www.co.monterey.ca.us/government/departments-a-h/administrative-office/office-of-emergency-services/recovery](http://www.co.monterey.ca.us/government/departments-a-h/administrative-office/office-of-emergency-services/recovery)

<https://www.ready.gov/recovering-disaster>

<https://www.caloes.ca.gov/cal-oes-divisions/recovery>

