**Recap of Supporting Young Children After the LA Wildfires**

**Dr. Ashlee Reid**

**You Are Not Hurting Your Child by Having Emotions**

Many parents worry about expressing their emotions in front of their children—wondering if crying or showing sadness will harm them. I want to assure you: you are not damaging your child by having feelings.

Instead, you are teaching them an important lesson about grief, resilience, and healing. Seeing you navigate big emotions in a healthy way reassures them that feelings are okay and that they don’t have to suppress their own.

**What Makes Something “Traumatic” for a Child?**

Trauma isn’t just about what happens to us—it’s about feeling helpless and alone in the moment. One of the best ways to help your child heal is to give them ways to take action so they don’t feel alone or powerless.

Ways to help children regain a sense of control:

* Movement & Play: Dance, go on walks in the new neighborhood, do a scavenger hunt in your new community.
* Shaking Off Fear: Turn it into a game—ask them to *shake their arms and legs like a wet dog* or *wiggle like spaghetti*.
* Slow, Controlled Movement: Rocking, stretching, crawling, or gentle bouncing can help regulate their nervous system.
* Helping Others: Encourage them to draw a picture or write a letter for a firefighter or loved one affected by the fires, cook a meal for a family in need, or donate a toy to another child.
* Grieving Rituals: If safe to do so, visit your old home to say goodbye, draw a picture of it, or plant a new tree in honor of what was lost.

**Using Play to Process What Happened**

Children don’t always process their feelings through words, but they do through play.

* Symbolic Play: Let them act out their experience using dolls, stuffed animals, or drawings.
* Power Play: Let them stomp like a big, strong bear or pretend to be a superhero moving through an obstacle course.
* Rhythmic & Predictable Activities: Jumping, rocking, or clapping games help regulate their nervous system.
* Creative Expression: Encourage them to draw, tell a story, or dance as a way of expressing their emotions.

**Supporting Children Who Seem Shut Down**

Some children may react by withdrawing or shutting down emotionally. If you notice this, try gentle ways to reconnect them to their body and senses:

* Soft Touch: Holding hands, using a weighted blanket, or pressing their feet into the ground can help them feel grounded.
* Breathing Exercises: Blowing bubbles, humming, or taking deep breaths together can provide a sense of calm.

**How Parents Can Support Their Child’s Emotions**

Young children take their emotional cues from the adults around them. Even if you are struggling, here are ways to help:

* Model Calmness: Say out loud, *“I feel my heart beating fast. Let’s take a deep breath together.”*
* Use a Warm, Reassuring Tone: Your voice, facial expressions, and body language send signals of safety.
* Hold Space Without Forcing Talking: If they aren’t ready to talk, that’s okay. Just being present with them is healing.

**Storytelling as a Healing Tool**

One of the most powerful ways to help your child process what has happened is through storytelling.

You can:

* Use books or create your own illustrated story with your child about their experience.
* Retell their story with a focus on their strength:
	+ *“I am so proud of you for listening and helping our family get to a safe place quickly.”*
	+ *“You were scared when we had to stay in a hotel, but you were so brave.”*

**Creating a Sense of Safety & Ownership**

Routines provide security. If bedtime used to be a 30-minute routine, extend it to provide more comfort and connection.

If your child lost toys in the fire, you can create a “goodbye” letter from their old toys:
*"We got hurt in the fire and can’t be played with anymore. We are so sad to say goodbye, but we are sending you this new toy. We told them how much you love tea parties and Bluey. Have fun together! Love, your toys."*

Even in a new space, help them feel ownership by saying:

* *“This is your side of the bed.”*
* *“This is your special pillow.”*
* *“This is your toothbrush.”*

These small reassurances help children feel grounded.

**Mindfulness & Emotional Language**

Many children don’t have the words to express what they feel. You can help by naming their emotions for them.

Instead of asking, *“How do you feel?”* (which might be too overwhelming), try:

* *“I see your face is frowning. You’re feeling sad about our house. I feel sad too.”*
* *“I see you stomping your feet. You’re feeling mad about what happened. I feel mad too.”*

If your child says, *“I just want to go home. I hate this fire!”* you can respond:

* *“I hate this fire too! It’s so unfair. I wish it never happened.”*

Since many children are hyper-aware of their parents’ phone use right now, narrate what you are doing:

* *“I’m checking my phone to see how far the fire is.”*
* *“I’m just looking at my messages for work.”*
* *“I’m stepping outside for a second, but I’ll be right back.”*

These small reassurances make a big difference.

**Closing:**

Parents, you are doing your best in an incredibly hard situation. Your presence, comfort, and reassurance mean more to your child than having the "perfect" words. Keep showing up, keep offering love, and trust that healing happens in small, everyday moments.

I hope this helps. Please reach out if you have any questions or need additional support.

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