Supporting Young Children During Wildfires

Young children are incredibly attuned to the emotions of the adults around them, and events like wildfires can stir up feelings of fear, confusion, and uncertainty. As educators, social workers, and caregivers, we have the opportunity to provide a sense of safety and connection during these moments.

Resources to Support You

- Zero to Three: Their resource hub includes articles and tips for talking to young children about natural disasters, helping them feel safe, and supporting emotional recovery. **Read "Coping with Trauma and Stress in the Face of Wildfires: Tips for Early Childhood Professionals."**
- National Child Traumatic Stress Network (NCTSN): Their wildfire toolkit includes age-specific guidance, coping strategies, and tools for creating calm and predictability during and after emergencies. **Access the toolkit here.**
- Piplo Productions: Their storytelling resources, including books and videos, can help children process their emotions through gentle, relatable narratives. Check out their tools for creating a sense of safety and hope for young children. **Watch a video version of *Trinka and Sam: The Big Fire.***
- Sesame Street in Communities: Sesame Workshop offers comforting resources for talking to children about emergencies, including videos, activities, and tips for creating a sense of safety. **Explore their resources here.**

What to Say to Young Children

1. Stay Calm and Reassuring
   - Reflective Language Suggestions:
     - "I'm here with you, and we're safe right now."
     - "The grown-ups are taking care of everything to make sure you're okay."
     - "We're staying together, and that helps us feel safe."
     - "Even though this is a hard time, we're going to get through it as a family."
2. Provide Simple, Honest Information
   - Reflective Language Suggestions:
     - "There are some fires nearby, and firefighters are working very hard to put them out."
     - "Sometimes the air outside can be smoky, but staying inside helps us stay healthy."
     - "The fire is far away from us, and there are people who are helping to keep it from coming closer."
     - "It's okay to ask me questions if you're wondering about something."
3. Validate Their Feelings
   - Reflective Language Suggestions:
     - "It's okay to feel scared or worried. I feel that way too sometimes."
     - "You're feeling sad because we can't go outside right now, and that's okay. It's hard to wait."
     - "It's normal to feel a lot of feelings when something big is happening. I'm here to listen."
     - "You're wondering why this is happening, and that's a good question. Let's talk about it."
4. Focus on Safety and Action
   - Reflective Language Suggestions:
     - "We're staying in a different house for now, where the air is clean, and that's how we stay healthy."
     - "We have a plan to stay safe, and I'll always let you know what we're doing next."
     - "The firefighters are helping by working to stop the fire, and we're helping by staying safe here."