



STUDENT AFFAIRS WELLNESS AREA

Dealing with the emotional impact of the Fires

The uncertainty, distress and loss we have been experiencing as a result of the devastating fires in San Diego County, are likely to elicit a host of emotions and concerns. Unfortunately, as we have all been watching the magnitude of these events with apprehension and disbelief, many in our community have been directly impacted by the destruction created by the fires. Understandably, it is to be expected that many of us may experience strong feelings such as helplessness, anxiety, and fear. Others may find themselves numbed and in shock. At times like these, it is important to remember that different people react and cope in vastly different ways. A person's natural temperament, social support, prior life experiences, coping skills, and the degree of exposure to the events, combine to trigger that individual's specific reaction. It is important, however, to be aware that most likely all of us may, at one point, experience emotional and/or physiological reactions. The acknowledgment of these emotional reactions and having an opportunity to openly talk about them helps to shorten recovery time and prevent complications of the natural healing process.

To address the possible reactions and concerns our students may have to the events we have all experienced, we would like to encourage you to consider giving them an opportunity to voice their emotions and concerns. It is important to help students understand that many of the emotional reactions they may be experiencing (e.g., concern, anxiety, numbness, disbelief) are to be expected in response to witnessing a disaster of this magnitude. In addition, it is to be expected that many of us may for some time find it difficult to concentrate, to remember things and/or to pay full attention. To assist in this process, enclosed you will find a document to help you understand the potential range of reactions students may experience, how these reactions may change overtime, how to respond by normalizing their experience, and how to identify and refer students in need of further help.

For those students that may need help or assistance coping with their experience, the Counseling Center's staff is available at 260-4655 or after hours through Public Safety Dispatch at extension 2222. In addition, University Ministry can also be a helpful resource to students in need (260-4735). Please encourage students to be aware of their own reactions and to seek assistance if needed. If you encounter any student who may be struggling or having difficulties, feel free to contact the Counseling Center's staff for consultation or to voice your concern.

Finally, you may want to discuss with your students USD's efforts to help the victims and survivors. You will be receiving information about these activities via e-mail or you can also visit the University's website for updates.