

BVSD opens fire help center for displaced students, staff

By Amy Bounds Camera Staff Writer
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How to help children after a natural disaster

Remain calm and reassuring:

Children take their cues from you, especially young children. Acknowledge the loss or destruction, but emphasize the community's efforts to cleanup and rebuild.

Acknowledge and normalize their feelings:

Allow children to discuss their feelings and concerns and address any questions they have regarding the event. Let them know that their reactions are normal and expected.

Encourage children to talk about disaster-related events:

Children need an opportunity to discuss their experiences in a safe, accepting environment. Provide activities that enable children to discuss their experiences. This may include a range of methods, such as drawing, stories, music and drama.

Promote positive coping and problem-solving skills:

Activities should teach children how to apply problem-solving skills to disaster-related stressors. Encourage children to develop realistic and positive methods of coping that increase their ability to manage their anxiety and to identify which strategies fit with each situation.

Emphasize children's resiliency:

Focus on their competencies. Help children identify what they have done in the past that helped them cope when they were frightened or upset.

Strengthen children's friendship and peer support: Children with

The Boulder Valley School District is opening a central help center for the families of 568 students who live in the Fourmile Fire evacuation area.

"We wanted to make sure that they had one place to come to receive services, information and resources," said Karen Daly, Boulder Valley's executive director of student success and heading up the center.

The help center will be open from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m. today through Friday in the board room at the Education Center, 6500 Arapahoe Road. Along with Boulder Valley staff members, a Red Cross representative will be available.

The center will provide help with transportation needs and information on transportation benefits available to students through the federal McKinney-Vento Act. Displaced students qualify for free lunch and can be bused from wherever they're staying to their home school.

The center also will have school supplies provided by Impact on Education, mental health help for coping with the disaster, information on after-school care and help for affected Boulder Valley staff members. At least 54 staff members live in the evacuated area, officials said.

"Whatever is needed, we've got it here," Daly said.

Individual schools also are offering help, including providing counselors for students who need them. The schools with the most students affected include Flatiron and Foothill elementary schools and Casey and Centennial middle schools, though many other schools also have affected students.

Melisa Potes, principal at northwest Boulder's Foothill, said about 100 of her school's students live in the evacuation area and about half of those came to school Tuesday.

"We have had many students absent in every class," she said. "The fire is truly impacting our school community. We will be here to support the families that lost homes."

She said teachers and others are helping all the students deal with the fire, including allowing them time to draw or write about their experiences.

At Boulder's Casey Middle School, Principal Alison Boggs said the school has students from 25 evacuated families. Almost all those students came to school Tuesday, she said, and teachers and counselors checked in regularly with them to offer support.

"The kids also are supporting each other," she said.

strong emotional support from others are better able to cope with adversity.

Take care of your own needs:

Take time for yourself and try to deal with your own reactions to the situation as fully as possible. You will be better able to help your children if you are coping well.

Source: National Association of School Psychologists

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