

# **GUIDELINES FOR THE RECOVERY OF INDIVIDUALS AND FAMILIES AFFECTED BY THE FIRE OF "ALT EMPORDÀ"**

**Guidelines written by the UTCCB  
Unit of Trauma, Crisis and Conflict  
Of Barcelona.**

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July

23,

2012

Witnessing a fire, having to evacuate the house, see, hear and smell its effects is a highly stressful situation for adults as for children and adolescents. After the first initial shock, the most common reactions typically include three kinds of patterns:

- **Hyperarousal** – it can be seen through a significant sensitivity to sounds or other stimuli similar to those experienced in the fire, and a signal that could potentially be dangerous. Children and adults as well, can easily be startled.
- **Avoidance** - individuals affected make intense efforts not to think, not to remember and carry out activities related to the event.
- **Re-experiencing** - in adults, intrusive images, sounds and smells may appear, with the same intensity as during the time of the fire. In children, the re-experiencing is usually expressed by repeated questions and games related to what happened. The re-experiencing is accompanied by a very intense and disturbing discomfort.

This type of stress reactions usually have a variable length depending on what each person has lived, but should not extend beyond four weeks, and during this time the recovery phase of the persons concerned already starts.

The aim of the recovery phase after the fire is to activate the individual and family strategies of coping to return to everyday life, and where appropriate, identify those with special needs, for whom this process may be more difficult.

The experienced fire has meant very different situations that, in turn, have caused different reactions in people, depending on their age, previous personal history, personal resources, etc. There is no "right way" to deal with a situation of intense stress. However, the following guidelines contain risk and protective factors that are generally acceptable for many different people:

## Guidelines for individuals and families present during the fire:

What to do	What not to do
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Stay calm, communicate appropriately and slowly in order to avoid exacerbating the stressful situation.</li><li>• As far as possible, avoid repeated exposure to television images and over information about the fire.</li><li>• Support the most vulnerable persons like children, adolescents and people who have already experienced some traumatic event or suffering from any mental illness in general, and disabled physically or mentally.</li><li>• Promote emotional communication among family members.</li><li>• Take care of health: food, rest, sleep, etc.</li><li>• Try to return to normal, sharing cleaning, inventory, etc.</li><li>• Accept the help and support from friends and family, which is essential for recovery.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• As far as possible do not separate children from their families. For them it is better to be near their parents and participate in recovery efforts.</li><li>• Do not increase the use of exciting substances such as coffee, cola, snuff and alcohol: it keeps the activation level high.</li><li>• Do not surrender to avoidance behaviours in front to stimuli that remind you of the fire: it only increases the fear.</li></ul>

## **When there are children:**

- Keep them away from the panic and crisis of adults.
- Try to calm them and create an atmosphere of serenity and empathic care around them.
- As far as possible, do not change too much their daily routines about food, bath, and sleep.
- Respond in a truthful and understandable way to their questions, but not going beyond what they asked.
- Keep away as possible from the images of the flames, either in nature and especially, on television.

### **IMPORTANT REMARK:**

The means of communication play a very important role during disasters, informing and supporting the population.

However, you should know that in the case of children, adolescents and young adults (up to 25 years old), studies show that been interviewed by the means of communication increased by 50% the risk of not recover without negative consequences.

If you have further questions about what is happening to you or your family members, you can consult with our **free and specialized assistance telephone number 900 10 15 80.**

## About UTCCB:

Trauma, Crisis and Conflict Unit of Barcelona (UTCCB) is the crisis intervention center of Barcelona that born with the vocation of offering specialized psychological intervention to individuals, groups and organizations in the before, during, and after a traumatic event.

The UTCCB is the result of an institutional agreement signed by Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB) – Faculty of Psychology-, the Col·legi Oficial de Psicòlegs de Barcelona (COPC) and the ITCCB.



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You can extend the information in the web:

<http://www.utccb.net>