

Addressing the Mental Health Impacts of California Wildfires

AAP Chapter 1

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October 20, 2020

From Trauma Transformed:

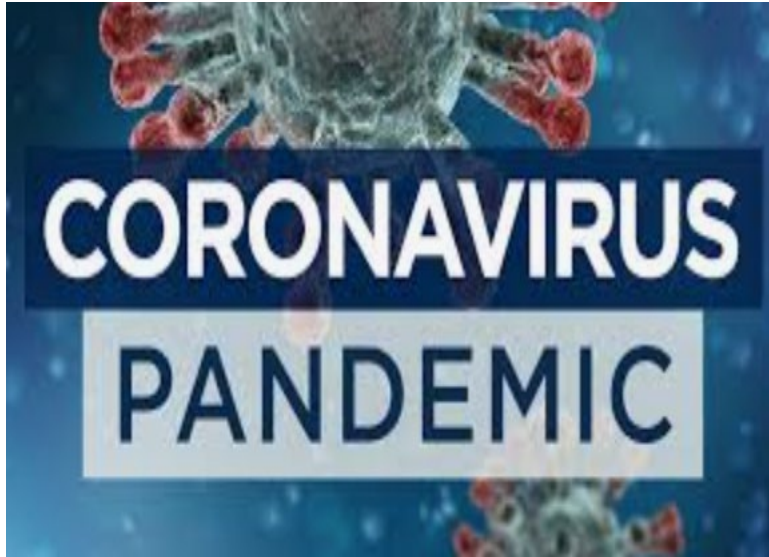
We acknowledge that we are in the midst of unprecedented times.

We acknowledge that we are each holding a multitude of feelings, responsibilities, fear, and joys- at the same time.

We acknowledge that there are many responses to stress and uncertainty- each of them valid.

We acknowledge that there is no better opportunity to practice compassion and collective care than right now. This is the work.

We acknowledge the critical need for reflection, inquiry and prioritization of the most critical needs.





A Mental-Health Crisis Is Burning Across the American West

Each fire season can compound the trauma of the one before it.

Story by Jacob Stern

| JULY 20, 2020



APA Journals Article Spotlight®

Summaries of recent APA Journals articles



March 25, 2020

Too Much Coronavirus Media Exposure May Be Bad for Your Health

Lack of access to Health Care

Police Brutality

Systemic Racism

Homelessness

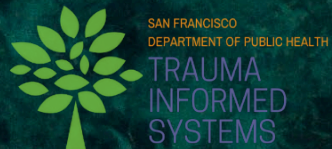
SAME STORM DIFFERENT BOATS

Xenophobia

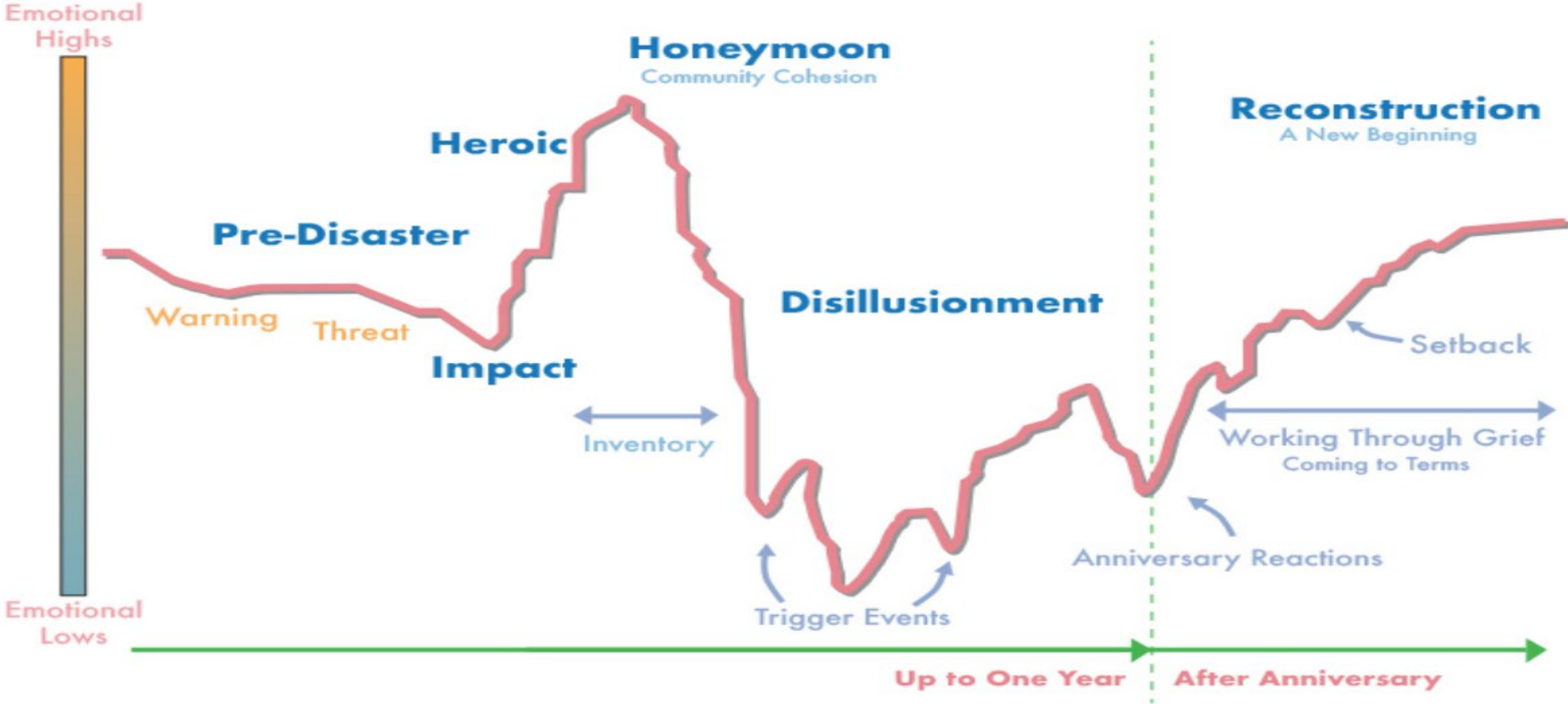
Anti-immigrant Prejudice

Poverty

Food Insecurity

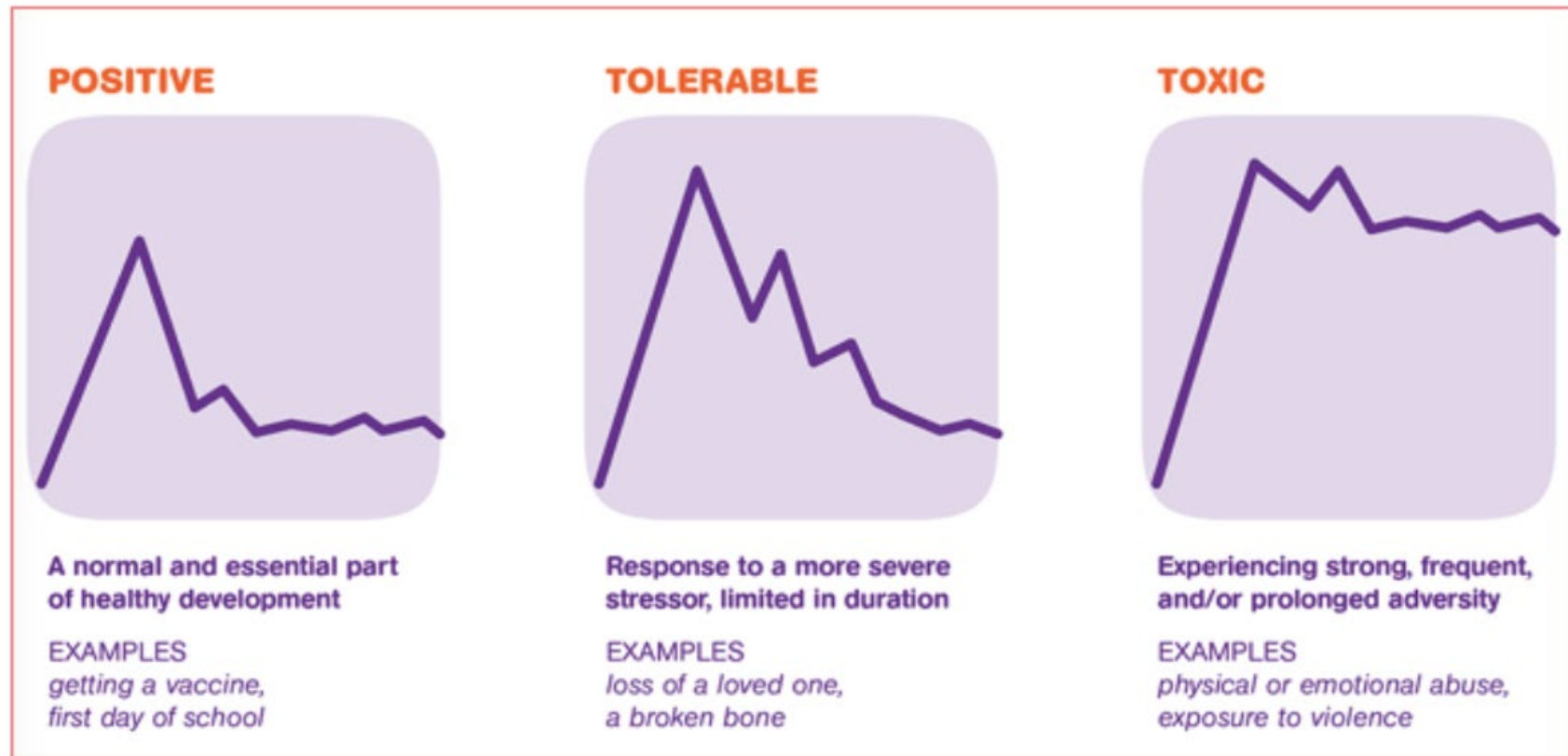


Phases of Disaster

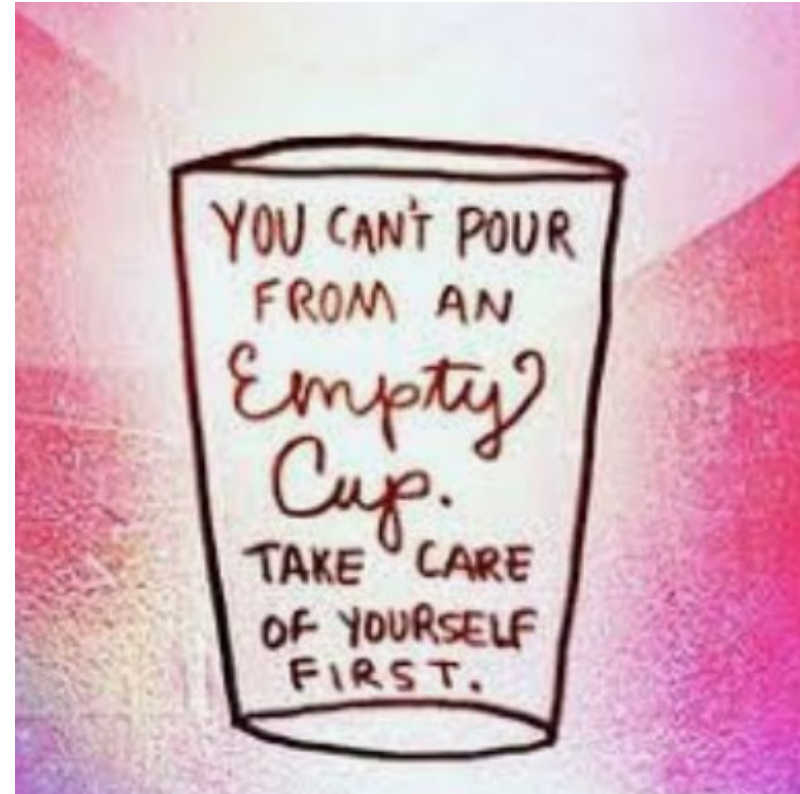


SAHMSA Adapted from Zunin & Myers as cited in DeWolfe, D. J., 2000. [Training manual for mental health and human service workers in major disasters.](#)

Types of Stress:



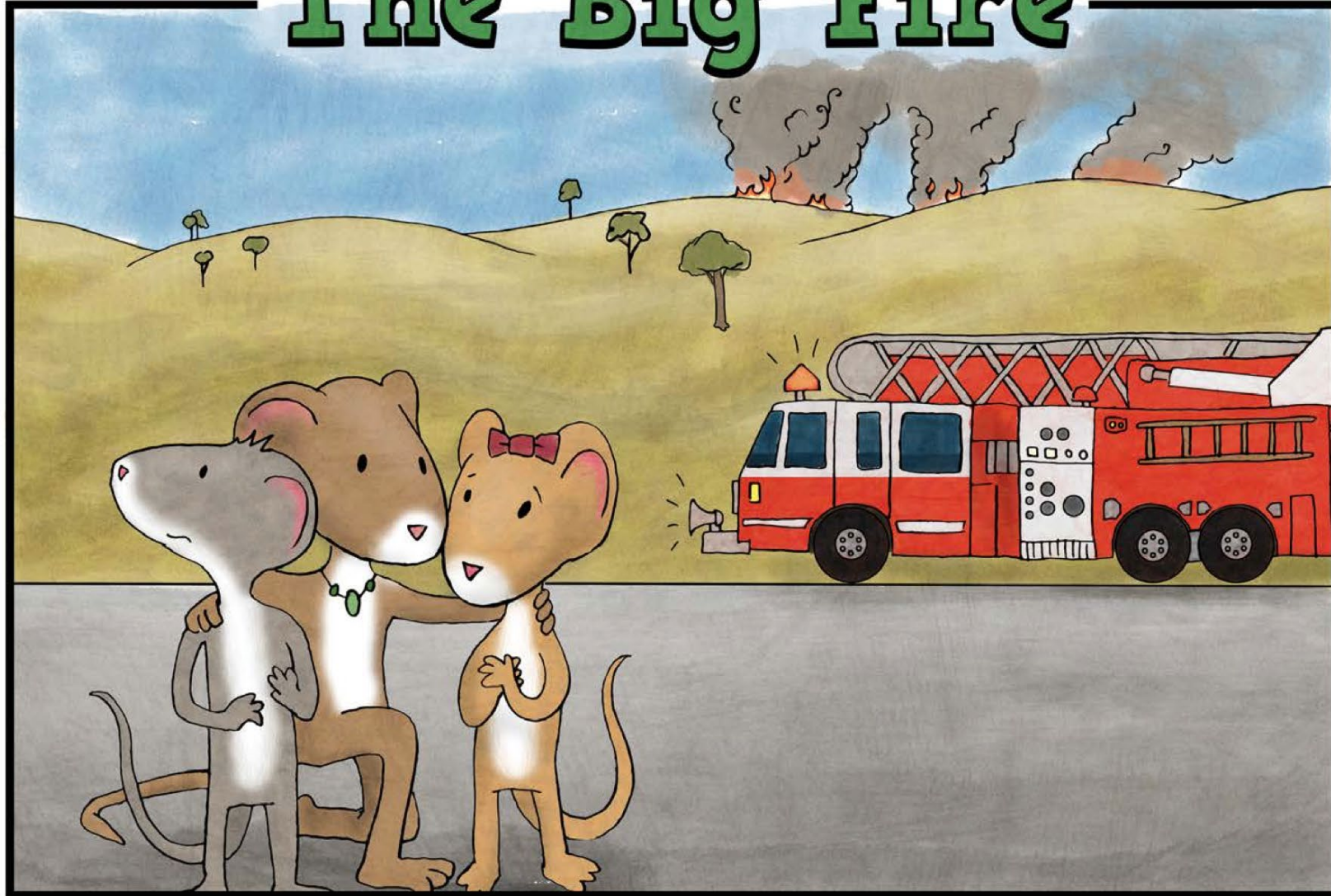
Kids feel our stress... and respond accordingly

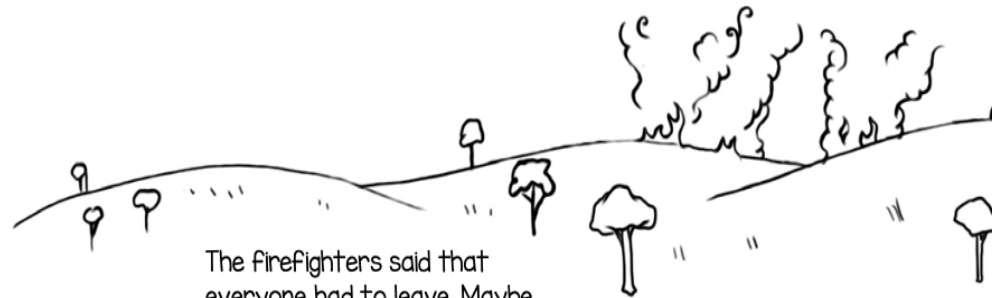


Johnston, Charlotte & Park, Joanne & Miller, Natalie. (2019). Parental cognitions: Relations to parenting and child behavior. 10.1007/978-3-319-94598-9_17.

Trinka and Sam

The Big Fire





The firefighters said that everyone had to leave. Maybe they are at the shelter. We can look for them there.

Where's my dad and brother?



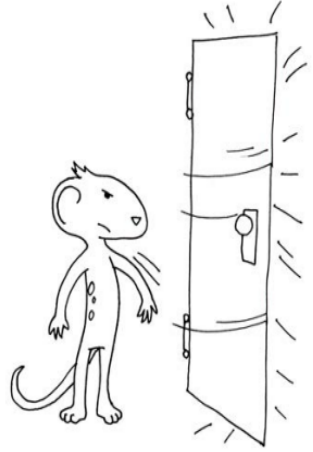
Trinka and Sam could see flames in the distance. The hills were glowing. They were scared. Sam was worried about his family.



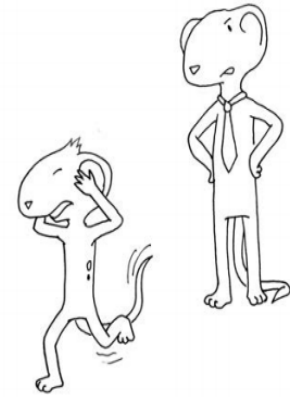
Even with the extra love, Sam did not feel the same. He felt mad. He felt cranky.



He took his brother's toy.



He slammed the door.



He didn't listen to his daddy.

He didn't behave right, and he didn't know why.

Before

- Know their wildfire risk.
- Be informed about how to access updated official wildfire information.
- Have an evacuation plan.
- Assemble an emergency go kit
- Make a family communication plan.
- Conduct regular landscaping grooming and maintenance.
- Plan for children's needs.



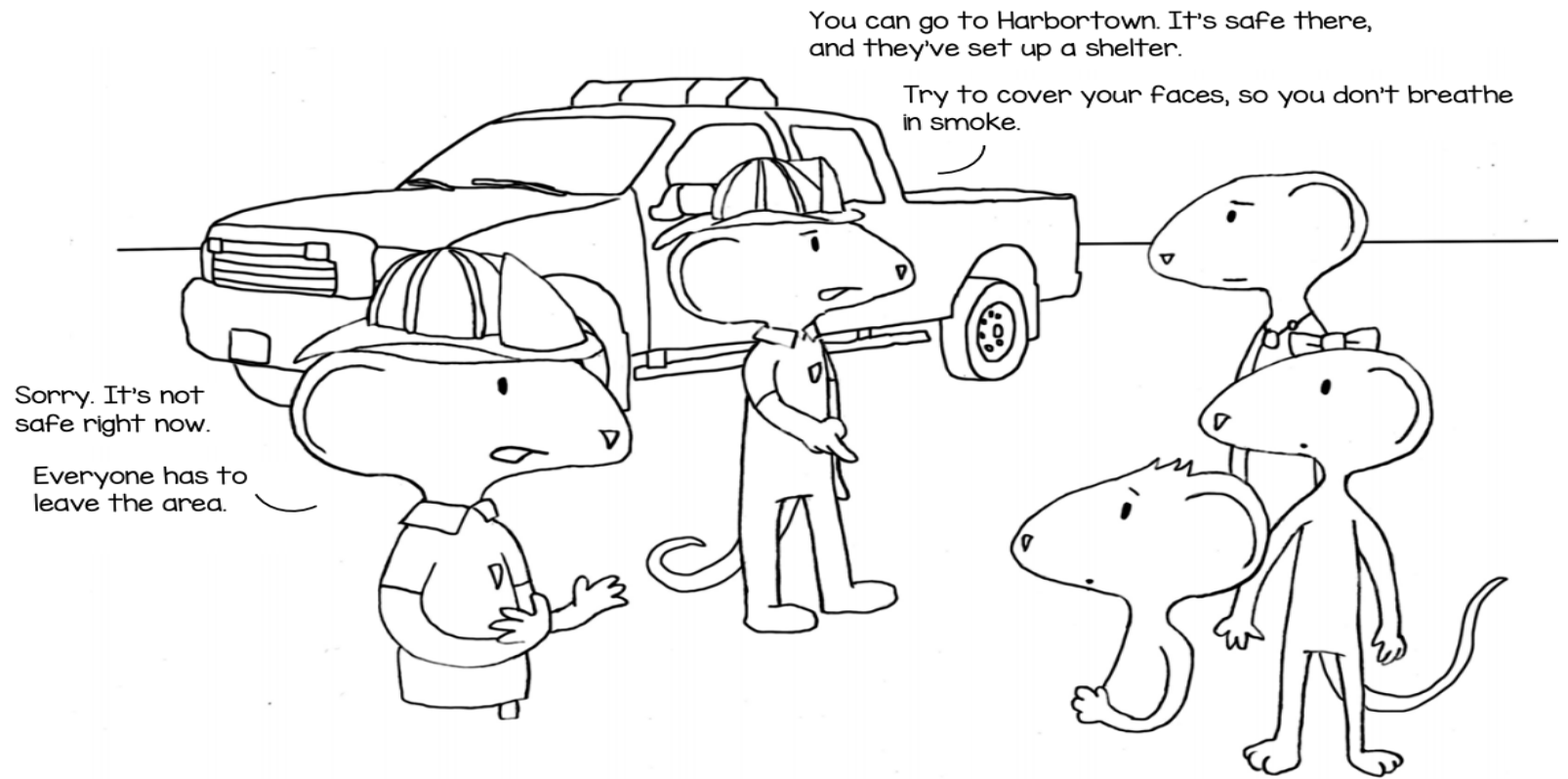
A fire truck went by.

"I know they are loud," said Trinkka's mom. "They need to go fast, so they can get to people who need help and put out the fires. Their siren is saying beep, beep. Please make way. We need to put out the fires."

During

When not in an evacuation zone, families should:

- **Keep smoke out.**
- **Minimize exposure to smoke and ash..**
- **Be ready to evacuate quickly.**
- **Water their roof and shrubs to reduce potential damage.**
- **Monitor their risk and evacuate as needed**
- **Gather their emergency go kit, all loved ones, and pets in their car or shared transportation.**
- **Locate a designated public shelter if needed.**



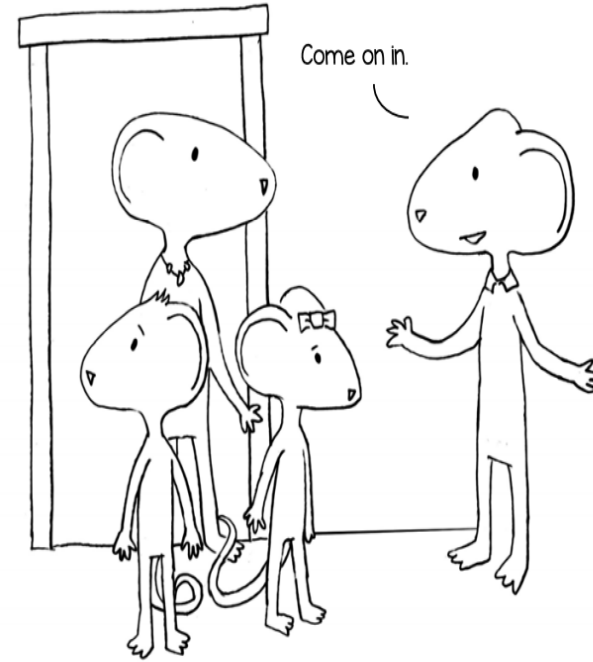
The firefighters said they should not go home. "The area is not safe right now and is being evacuated." The firefighters told them where they could go.

To address children's reactions during a wildfire, parents and caregivers can:

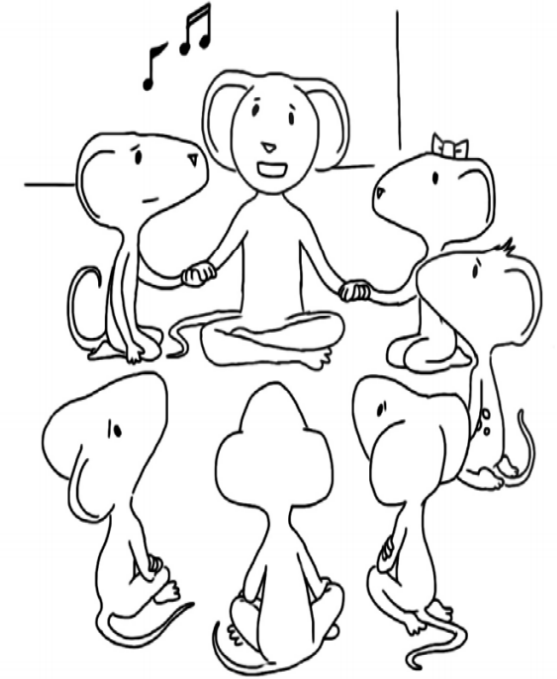
- **Model calm behavior..**
- **Provide simple but accurate information in a quiet, steady voice.**
- **Encourage comforting or distracting activities**
- **Practice their own self-care.**

After

- Parents and caregivers should:
- Model being calm and hopeful after the wildfire.
- Provide accurate information and answer questions honestly and at an appropriate developmental level.
- Be patient when responding to changes in behavior.
- Provide reassurance, a daily routine, and structure.
- Pay attention to their own wellbeing and coping.



When they got to the shelter, there were nice people there. They gave them water and told them where to go.



Some kids were singing. Trinko and Sam sat down with them.

Building Resilience

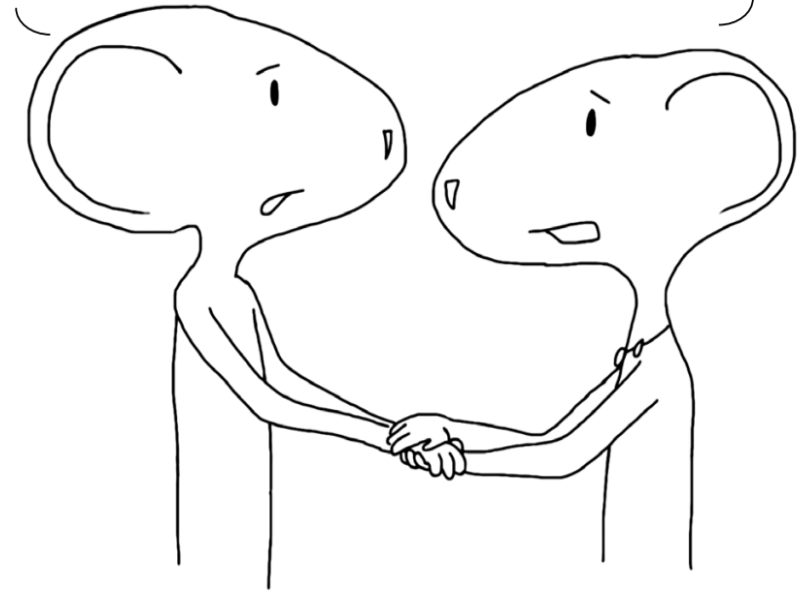
Thank you for saving our home.



They were grateful to all the firefighters who had worked so hard to put out the fire. The firefighters said there were still fires in another area. They would be watching, but the children could not play outside because of the smoke. School might be closed for a while, and when it opened, they might not be able to play outside during recess until the smoke was gone, and it was easy to breathe.

Power of witnessing resilience
Empathy and connection to growth
Connection to sense of purpose

We couldn't do that.



We will clear out a room so that you can stay with us while you decide what to do.

We are neighbors, and it could have been us staying with you if things had been different.

It was very strange that Trinka and Sam's houses were ok but Piplo's was not, but this is what fires sometimes do. Trinka's mom said that they had just been lucky. Piplo's family could stay with them while they decided what to do.

Deepened understanding of role of spirituality and culture
Developing Hope and Engagement
Supportive relationships

To Build Resilience

1. Make connections

Accept help and support from those who care about you and listen.

2. Accept change

Accept that change is part of living. Accepting what can't change helps you focus on what can be.

3. Trust yourself

Nurture a positive view of yourself and your ability to solve problems.

4. Act decisively

Act on problems rather than detach and wish they would go away.

5. Build hope

Try visualizing what you want, rather than worrying about what you fear.

6. Look ahead

Find purpose in your healing and service to others. Avoid seeing crises as insurmountable problems.

7. Move forward

Ask yourself, "What's one thing I can accomplish today that helps me move toward my goals?"

8. Self-reflect

Look for opportunities to learn about yourself. How have you grown as a result of your struggles?

9. Practice self-care

Pay attention to your own needs and feelings. Engage in activities that you enjoy and find relaxing.

10. Keep perspective

Focus on the important things in your life. Cultivate moments of gratitude daily.

Children under 5

- Patience and tolerance
- Provide reassurance (verbal and physical)
- Encourage expression through play, reenactment, story-telling
- Allow short-term changes in sleep arrangements
- Plan calming, comforting activities before bedtime
- Maintain regular family routines
- Avoid media exposure



From: NCTSN 9 2 20

Grade Schoolers

Patience, tolerance, and reassurance

Play sessions and staying in touch with friends

Regular exercise and stretching

Engage in educational activities (workbooks, educational games)

Participate in structured household chores

Set gentle but firm limits

Discuss the current outbreak and encourage questions



Encourage expression through play and conversation

Help family create ideas for enhancing health promotion behaviors and maintaining family routines

Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard

Address any stigma or discrimination occurring and clarify misinformation

Adolescents



Patience, tolerance, and reassurance

Encourage continuation of routines

Encourage discussion of outbreak experience with peers, family (but do not force)

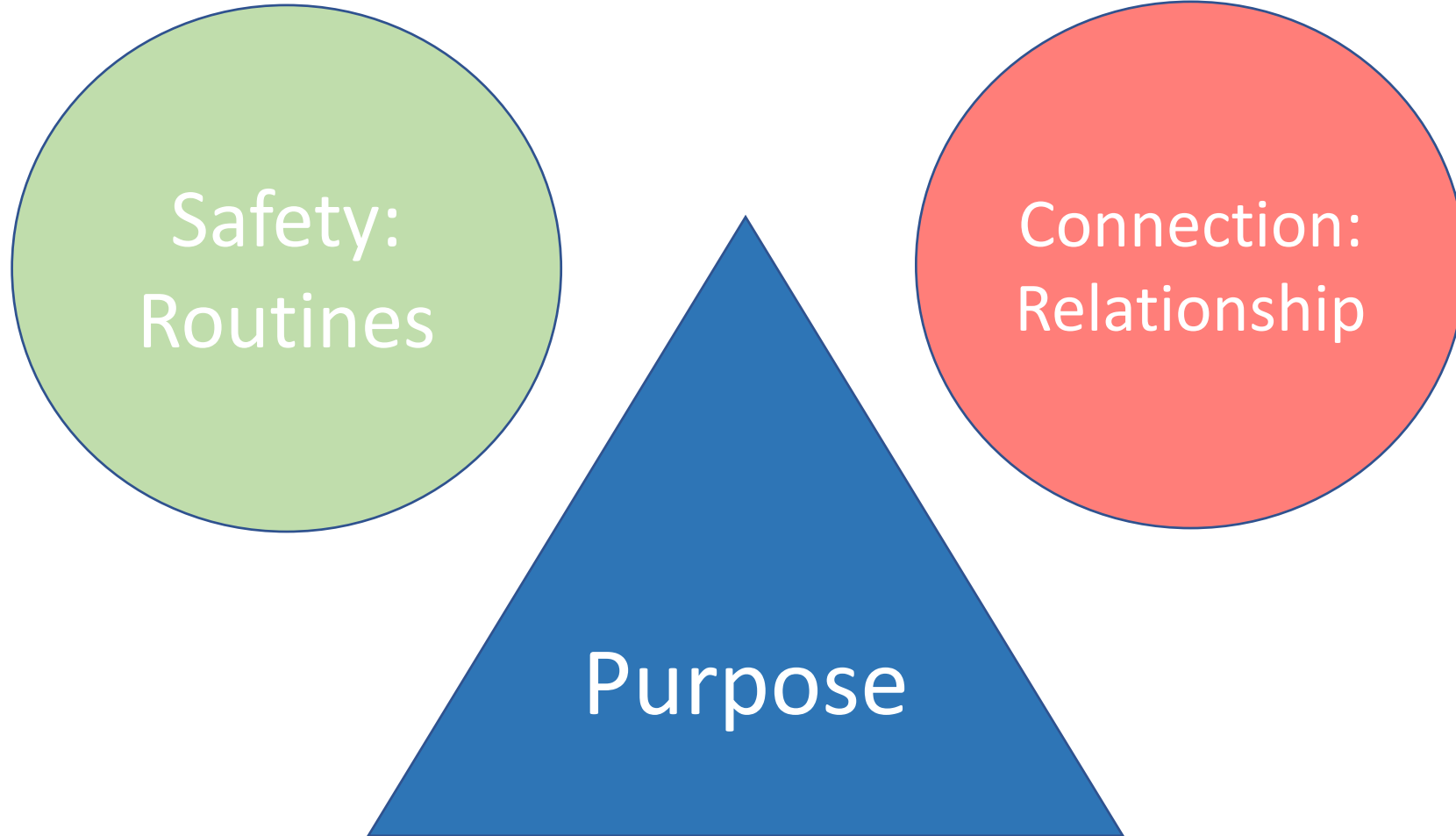
Stay in touch with friends through telephone, Internet, video games

Participate in family routines, including chores, supporting younger siblings, and planning strategies to enhance health promotion behaviors

Limit media exposure, talking about what they have seen/heard including at school

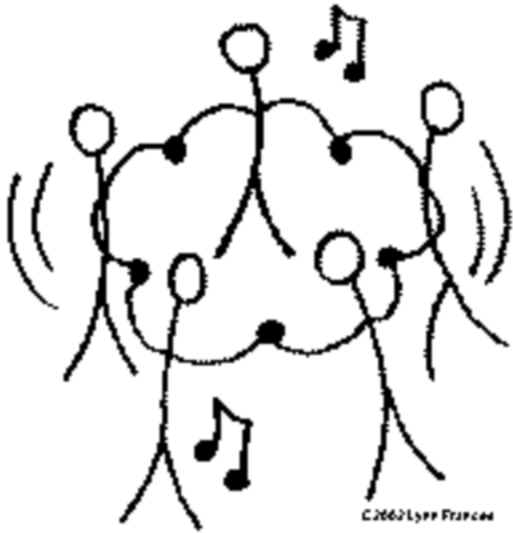
Discuss and address stigma, prejudice and potential injustices occurring during outbreak

Re-regulation:



Creating Safety

- Rhythms, Routine, Schedule, Structure
- Shared meals, Exercise, Sleep
- Limit media (specific times)



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Additional Resources

NCTSN.org:

Information about children, disasters, and trauma, including information about the emotional impact of fires.

- Wildfire: <https://www.nctsn.org/what-is-child-trauma/trauma-types/disasters/wildfire-resources>
- Simple Activities for Families during evacuations and when indoors [HTTPS://WWW.NCTSN.ORG/RESOURCES/SIMPLE-ACTIVITIES-CHILDREN-AND-ADOLESCENTS](https://www.nctsn.org/resources/simple-activities-children-and-adolescents)
- SKILLS FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL RECOVERY ONLINE: [HTTPS://WWW.NCTSN.ORG/RESOURCES/SKILLS-PSYCHOLOGICAL-RECOVERY-SPR-ONLINE](https://www.nctsn.org/resources/skills-psychological-recovery-spr-online)
- NCTSN: Help Kids Cope: An app for Android and Apple mobile devices to help children cope before, during, and after a disaster such as fire or floods.
- NCTSN: After a Crisis Helping Young Children Heal – A one page tip sheet for caregivers
- Piploproductions.com: Other stories and information to help families heal including “Once I Was Very Very Scared”
- Smokeybear: Prevention activities for children and educators
- Sesame Street: Let’s Get Ready! Planning Together for Emergencies with tips, activities, and other tools to help the whole family prepare for emergencies (both in English and Spanish)
- Sesame Street: Traumatic Experiences A toolkit to help families after traumatic experiences.
- Weather WizKids Wildfires: Information about wildfires
- Zerotothree.org. Information about young children and early childhood development

Signs of PTSD in Children Following a Trauma



Illustration by JR Bee, Verywell

PTSD Risk Factors

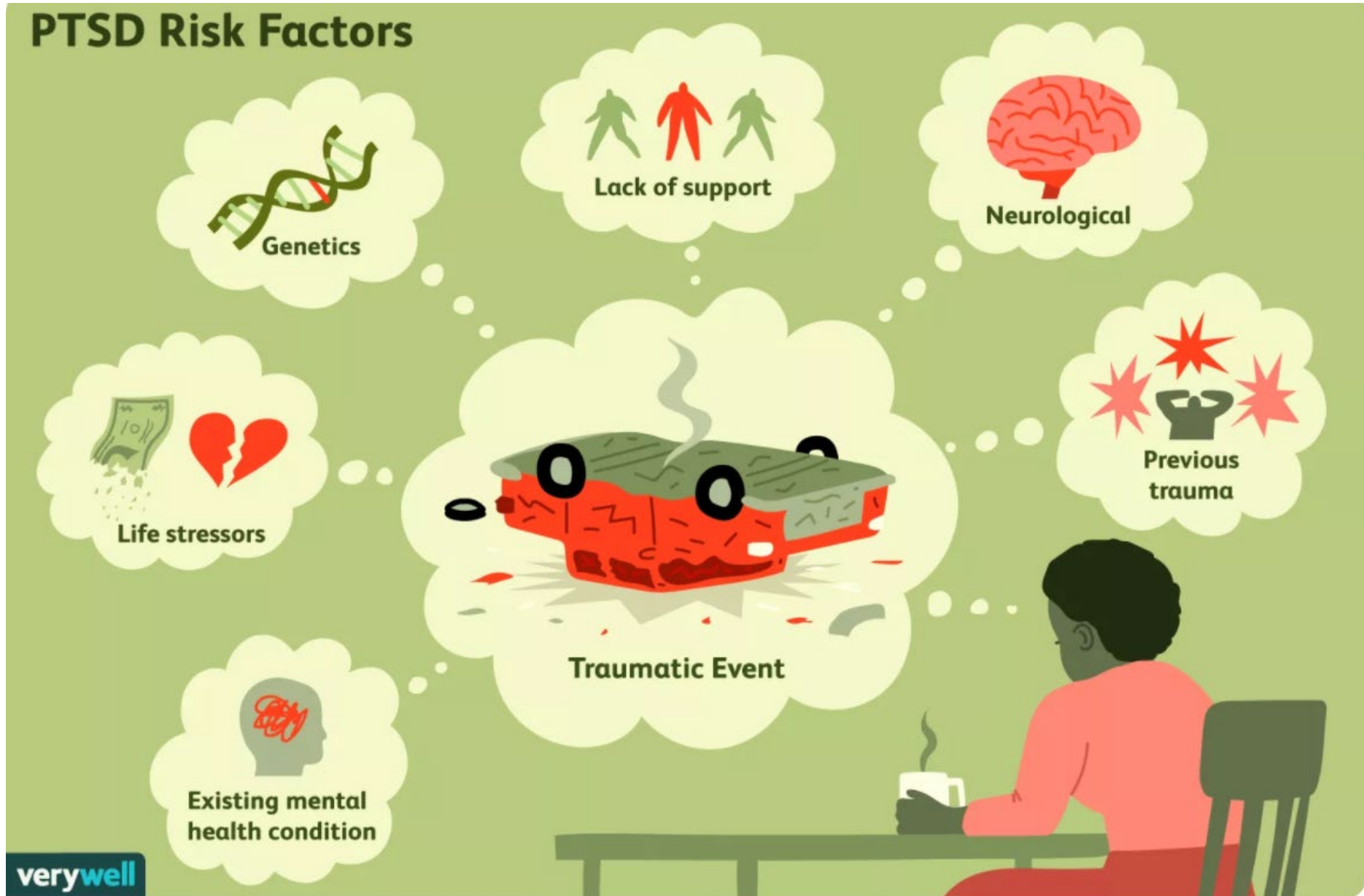


Illustration by JR Bee, Verywell

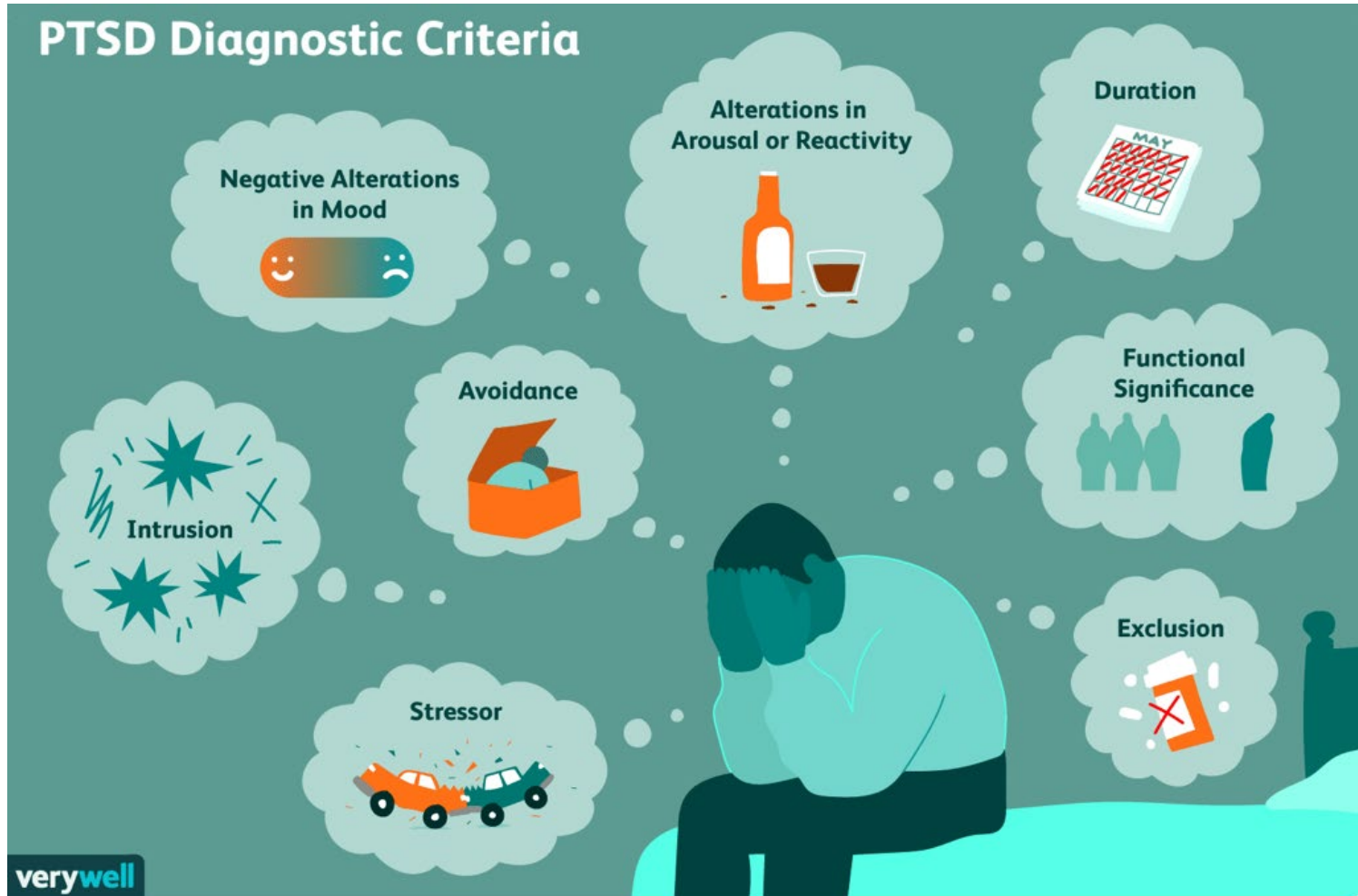


Illustration by JR Bee, Verywell

- PTSD prevalence = 4-8%
- Estimate ~10-30% in wildfire survivors

National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

- Exposure/threat of death/serious injury/sexual violence
 - Re-experiencing: Memories, nightmares, flashbacks
 - Avoidance
 - Negative Mood Changes
- For at least 1 month duration
Worrisome if > 6mo, refer