

# There Was a Fire

A story for young children on Maui

# A note for caregivers

This story is designed for children ages 3-8 who have been affected by the Maui wildfires.

The pictures and language used is generic, but does mention that people died in the fire. Children who have directly experienced loss or children with limited language may need a more personalized version of this story. Please edit the pdf as needed for the children in your care to be more or less specific.

At the end of the story there is a list of resources for caregivers.

Stay safe.

Liz Hartline  
Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education  
Honolulu Community College  
elizabeth.hartline@hawaii.edu

The winds were blowing very hard in Maui from a hurricane that was passing. A hurricane is a really big storm, with lots of wind and rain.

Usually winds are safe for people.

There were also wildfires burning. Wildfires happen when it doesn't rain very much.

Wildfires are usually safe for people. Firefighters work to keep them far away from houses, schools, and businesses.





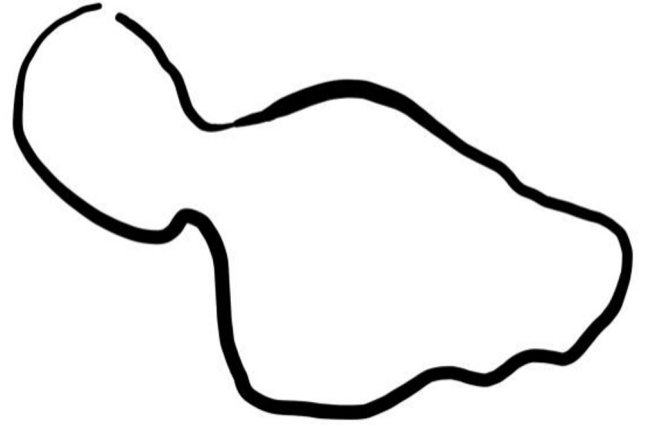
But this time in Maui, the big winds combined with the big fire. The fire spread faster than the firefighters could put it out.

The fire was very dangerous and very scary. Some people jumped in the water to escape from the fire. A lot of buildings burned down. Some people died in the fire.

The fires are still burning, but the firefighters have contained them and are keeping people safe. The fires that are burning now are not dangerous to people, because people are staying away from them.

When bad things happen, communities help each other. The community of Maui is helping each other by calling their friends, giving their friends a place to stay, and helping out at shelters.

Everyone around Hawai'i is thinking about the people of Maui. They are sending food, clothes, and money.





Some people still feel scared about the fire. They may worry about everything that was burned in the fire. They may feel sad about Lahaina town being burned or the people who died. They may wonder, “will there be another fire?”

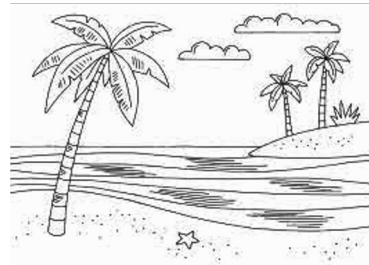
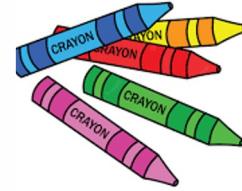
It is normal to feel sad, scared, and worried. These feelings may feel heavy in your body, or like you are distracted all the time. Kids have those feelings, and so do grown-ups.

When you have big feelings, you can tell a grown-up about them. Feelings are safe to have, even though they can be uncomfortable. Talking to grown-ups can help you feel better.

Here are some other things you can do when you are sad, scared, or worried:

- ask for a hug
- draw a picture
- cuddle a stuffed animal or a pet
- take some deep breaths
- play firefighter
- play with play dough
- go to the beach
- help your family make a safety plan

Can you think of anything else?





It is grown-ups job to make sure that kids are safe, and grown-ups are thinking and planning to keep everyone safe.

Kids have a job too! Kids' job is let people know when they are having big feelings so that grown-ups can help them feel better.

A bad thing happened on Maui. But the people of Maui are working together to fix their island, and to help everyone feel safe again.



# \*Caregiver Resource\* - Trauma and young children

People who have experienced trauma struggle with feeling safe. The core tenets of what is known as trauma-informed care are:

- **Predictability** - Children feel safer when they know what to expect. Make routines, even small ones, as predictable as possible, and draw your child's attention to them. If your family has been displaced, this may look like saying goodnight in the same way as you did before the fire.
- **Flexibility** - Trauma is very dysregulating - it makes people feel out of control. Meet children's big feelings with empathy and flexibility.
- **Connection** - Children are very resilient, and the number one protective factor is connection with nurturing caregivers. Prioritize connection with your child.
- **Empowerment** - A hallmark of trauma is loss of control. Give children things that they can be in charge of, or ways that they or your family together can help others.

For more information on this framework, consult the work of [Alex Shevrin Venet](#).

## \*Caregiver Resource\* - Top tips for caregivers

- **Avoid exposure to news** footage of the fires to the greatest extent possible.
- Know **when you need a break**, and have a plan to take care of your own stress and mental health.
- Find child-friendly language that describes your family's experience of the fire, and begin to **tell it as a story**. Acknowledge the feelings, and emphasize the ways that your family has been helped or is helping others. Giving language to your experience is a powerful healing tool.
- Create a **safety plan** with your family, and have your child help. There are links on the next page with examples.
- **Expect atypical behavior** from your child. This may look like acting out, withdrawal, or clinginess. Know that they are asking for your love and support.
- **Play pretend** - as much as possible - and let your child take the lead. Do not shut down play that is disturbing, as this is children's primary way of expressing conflicting emotions.

## \*Caregiver Resources\* - Links and books

- [Sesame Street](#) has a great page on talking to children about emergencies, and tips for making a safety plan with children
- [Trinka and Sam and the Big Fire](#) - a downloadable book about a family who lost their house to a wildfire. For some children, this book may be more accessible, because it is about mice and written in a storybook form.
- [Tip sheet](#) from the National Child Traumatic Stress Network
- [Book list](#) to support children in coping with disasters
- If you are concerned about your child's mental health, you can call or text Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration's (SAMHSA's) Disaster Distress Hotline: 1-800-985-5990