

Lesson Plan  
Helping Young Children Understand the Los Angeles Fires  
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**Foreword:** This story contains factual information that may be abstract for children aged 3–5. Caregivers are encouraged to adapt the language and details to suit their audience. For children in this age group, the primary goal is to help them understand fires, recognize emotions, develop empathy, and feel reassured about their safety. For children aged 6–8, the focus shifts toward building an understanding of the Los Angeles fires, empowering them with knowledge, and encouraging meaningful actions.

**Objectives:**

1. Help young children **understand** the Los Angeles fires
2. Help the child **identify** their feelings
3. **Redirect** the child to positive perspectives and heroic acts
4. **Empower** the child to engage in helping behavior
5. **Reassure** parental unconditional love and their safety
6. **Prompt** actions and **instill** hope

**Ages:** 3- to 8-Year-Olds

**Book:** Fire, Fire, Go Away-A Social Story About the Los Angeles by Dr. Shu-Chen Jenny Yen. Free download at <https://socialstorycenter.com/>.

**Procedures:**

1. *Introduction:* Begin by letting the child know that you will be reading a storybook about the Los Angeles fires. Show them the book to help spark their curiosity and interest.
2. *Discussion starters:* Start the conversation by saying, "Today, we're going to talk about fires." Ask the child if they've had any experiences with fires, such as seeing a campfire or a fireplace. For younger children aged 3–5, introduce the topic with examples they can relate to, like candles, hot stoves, or birthday candles. Then explain, "We're going to read a story about fires in Los Angeles, California," to provide context for the discussion.
3. *Read the book:* Use a dialogical reading approach to engage the child in an interactive conversation while reading, rather than simply reading the book word-for-word.
  - **For children aged 3–5**, adapt the language by choosing or substituting age-appropriate words to help them better understand the story. Simplify complex terms when needed.
  - Encourage the child's engagement by asking open-ended questions and commenting on the pictures or illustrations. With younger children, focus more on discussing the pictures or photos to hold their attention.
  - Ask if the child can relate their own experiences to the pictures or text in the book. For example, "Have you ever seen a firetruck like this?" or "Do you remember seeing candles at a birthday party?"
  - Pause to discuss key concepts, such as the work of firefighters, how helicopters are used to fight fires, caring for pets during emergencies, or how people can help by donating items. These discussions help deepen the child's understanding and connection to the story.
4. After reading the book, choose **appropriate questions** for discussion:
  - a. For 3- to 5-year-olds
    - How do you feel after hearing the story?
    - What do you think other people might feel in situations like this? If you had to pack quickly, what items would you choose to take with you?
    - What would you do if a friend lost their home and had nothing left? How could you help them?
    - What would you like to say or do to thank the firefighters or others?

- If you could send a message to the people affected by the fire, what would you say?
  - What are some ways you could help fire victims?
  - What can we do to stay safe and protect ourselves from fires?
- b. For 6- to 8-year-olds
- How did the story make you feel?
  - What can you do to manage or express these feelings?
  - What caused the fires? Why do you think there are so many wildfires in California?
  - Do you know why the Earth is getting hotter each year? Have you heard about global warming?
  - What are some things we can do to protect the environment?
  - How can we help prevent wildfires?
  - What are some ways we can support people who have been affected by the fires?
  - If you ever needed to evacuate, what would your plan be?

**Follow-Up Activities:** After reading the book, you can do the activities below with the child or let the child complete the activities based on their age and developmental level.

Check Children's Emotion: Using the Emotion Thermometers to help children identify and express their feelings. Download the worksheet and work with children to identify their feelings.

<https://www.therapistaid.com/therapy-worksheet/emotion-thermometers>

Practical life activity:

Teach children about fire safety such as how to recognize if there is a fire (smoke).

Tell an adult to call 911 for help.

Teach children "Stop, drop, and roll" if their clothes catch on fire.

Discuss about never playing with matches, candles, cooking appliances and to never touch them.

Art Activity

- Draw pictures of their emotion about the fires.
- Draw pictures of the fires.
- Draw pictures of "before" and "after" of houses, playgrounds, and schools.

Writing Activity

- Write a letter to the fire victims, firefighters, and volunteers.
- Write a letter to the Earth showing the plan to take of the mother earth in the future.
- Create a storybook for individual children if they have experienced the evacuation or were impacted by the fires and would like to write about it.

Science Activity:

- Children ages 3-5: Sorting: Sort items that are dry or wet to determine what will catch on fire (e.g., wet sponge vs. dry sponge).
- Children ages 6-8: Study how wildfires start and spread, using activities from NC State University at <https://cnr.ncsu.edu/news/2021/12/explainer-how-wildfires-start-and-spread/>

**Talking to Young Children about Los Angeles Fires**

- PBS: <https://www.pbssocal.org/education/how-to-talk-to-kids-about-wildfires>
- CCRC: <https://www.ccrca.org/parents/strengthening-families-blog/item/how-to-help-children-manage-stress-caused-by-california-wildfires/>
- Ideas for Teaching Children about Emotion: <https://www.ecmhc.org/ideas/emotions.html>
- *Physics of fires*: <https://firelab.org/project/physics-fire-spread>
- *Climate Change*: Study the climate change information from the United Nations: <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-climate-change#:~:text=Humans%20are%20responsible%20for%20global,over%20the%20last%20200%20years.>

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