

GET BACK ON YOUR FEET: RECOVERING AFTER A DISASTER

The recovery process following a major earthquake will require the concerted efforts of all members of the community. Individuals, families and neighborhoods will need to assist each other, government and voluntary agencies in restoring the community to normal.

Your family will need to:

- **Take an inventory of your home.** List and photograph all losses and damage.
- **Keep receipts for emergency repairs and purchases** of repair supplies and equipment.
- **Compile tax records, insurance policies and photographs of damage** for assistance applications and insurance claims.

Recovery

For many, the weeks and months of recovery after a disaster can be even more traumatic than the catastrophe itself. As you develop your personal and neighborhood plans, consider what it will be like for your neighborhood two weeks to two months after the disaster.

Energy Needs

- Plan to cook together to save resources
- Consider building several solar cookers
- Establish sites for latrines or port-a-potties and learn how to maintain them
- Set up a neighborhood plan for waste collection. Refuse collection may be disrupted since crews will be responsible for removing unusual amounts of debris citywide.

Shelters

People do not like staying in shelters. If your home were uninhabitable, could you live in your yard in a tent or a trailer? Do you have a tent? Is there someone in your neighborhood whose house may be in better shape with whom you could stay and be close to your home and its contents?

Security

Following a major disaster, there are people who will take advantage of the situation. Uninhabited homes and unlighted areas invite looters and thieves. As soon as you determine that access to your street is not needed by emergency vehicles, park cars across the ends of the street and post people there to monitor people coming through your block. Merely having someone there to ask, "whom are you visiting?" may deter unwanted visits. The fact that the block is being watched works in much the same way as Neighborhood Watch deters crime. Neighbors watching out for neighbors works! Neighbors may sign up for watches until lighting is restored and an air of normalcy prevails.

Cleaning Up

It is difficult to go into your own home and see cherished belongings broken and your comfort zones a terrible mess. Buddy up and help one another with cleaning up. Set a work time to clear the street, sidewalk and areas for common use.

Psychological Considerations

Having just experienced the shock and pain of a disaster, you will be very busy during the following days or weeks. Caring for your immediate needs, perhaps finding a new place to stay, planning for clean up and repairs and filing claim forms may occupy the majority of your time. As the immediate shock wears off, you will start to rebuild and put your life back together. There are normal reactions we may all experience as a result of a disaster. Generally, these feelings don't last long, but it is common to feel let down and resentful many months after the event. Some feelings or responses may not appear until weeks or even months after the disaster.

Some common responses are:

- irritability/anger
- fatigue
- loss of appetite
- inability to sleep
- nightmares
- sadness
- headaches or nausea
- hyperactivity
- lack of concentration
- increase in alcohol or drug consumption

Many victims of a disaster will have at least one of these responses. Acknowledging your feelings and stress is the first step to feeling better.

Tips for Psychological Recovery

- ➔ **Talk about your disaster experiences.** Sharing your feelings, rather than holding them in, will help you feel better about what happened.
- ➔ **Take time off from cares, worries and home repairs.** Take time for recreation, relaxation or a favorite hobby. Getting away from home for a day or a few hours with close friends helps.
- ➔ **Pay attention to your health, maintain a good diet and get adequate sleep.** Relaxation exercises may help if you have difficulty sleeping.
- ➔ **Prepare for possible future emergencies** to lessen feelings of helplessness and to bring peace of mind.
- ➔ **Rebuild personal relationships** in addition to repairing other aspects of your life. Couples should make time to be alone together, both to talk and to have fun.
- ➔ **If stress, anxiety, depression, or physical problems continue, utilize the post-disaster services** provided by the local mental health center or your insurance provider.

Helping Your Child After a Disaster

Children may be especially upset about the disaster. These reactions are normal and usually will not last long. Here are some common reactions you may see in your children:

- ➔ excessive fear of darkness, separation, or being alone
- ➔ clinging to parents, fear of strangers
- ➔ worry
- ➔ increased immature behaviors
- ➔ not wanting to go to school
- ➔ changes in eating/sleeping behaviors
- ➔ increased aggressive behavior or shyness
- ➔ bed-wetting or thumbsucking
- ➔ persistent nightmares
- ➔ stomachaches, headaches, or other physical complaints

Here are some helpful things you can do to help your child recover:

- ➔ **Talk with your child about his/her feelings** about the disaster. Share your feelings, and give your child information he/she can understand.
- ➔ **Reassure your child that you are safe and together.** You may need to repeat this reassurance often.

- ➔ **Hold and touch your child often.**
- ➔ **Spend extra time with your child at bedtime.**
- ➔ **Allow your child to mourn or grieve** over the loss of a toy, blanket, home or pet.
- ➔ **Talk to your child's teacher** if your child is having problems at school, so you can work together to help your child.

What Neighborhoods Can Do

- ➔ Start cleanup and remove debris from streets and yards.
- ➔ Determine the need for and sources of drinking water.
- ➔ Organize sanitation disposal.
- ➔ Help neighbors locate disaster assistance centers and obtain the relief they are entitled to.