

Facing the Prospect of Rebuilding After a Natural Disaster

Many people feel a profound sense of loss when their home is damaged or destroyed by a natural disaster. You may be sad about the loss of precious belongings or feel overwhelmed by the prospect of rebuilding. These are normal responses to a devastating event like a natural disaster. It's important to give yourself time to adjust to the loss and to tackle the rebuilding process one step at a time so you don't feel overwhelmed.

Coping with loss after a natural disaster

The days, weeks, and months after a natural disaster will be challenging on a practical level as you begin the process of rebuilding. They will also be challenging on an emotional level because you will be coping with many less tangible losses.

- **Focus on small, daily tasks. Rebuilding is a major undertaking. You may feel more able to cope with the process if you break it down into small, manageable steps and try not to feel rushed. If you try to do everything at once you will probably just feel overwhelmed and exhausted.**
- **Be patient with yourself. You won't be able to just "get over" a natural disaster. You need time to grieve the loss of your home and accept the idea of rebuilding.**
- **Try to spend extra time with family and friends. You may also find it comforting to reach out to other people in your community who have been affected by the natural disaster.**
- **Remember what really matters -- the people in your life, not the possessions. Your memories cannot be destroyed by a natural disaster. If you are having trouble coping with the loss of some irreplaceable items, such as photographs, ask family members to make copies of special photos for you.**

Taking care of yourself

The best thing you can do to cope during a stressful time is to take care of yourself. Make sure that you have a safe place to stay and

that you have access to everything you need for daily living. If you need help, contact a local or federal relief agency. Use the resources listed at the end of this article for information about how to get help.

- **Do not stay in an unsafe home.** Many people are reluctant to go to a shelter or feel that they need to stay in their homes to ward off looters. But staying in a home that has been damaged by a natural disaster can be very dangerous. Your home may have structural damage that you're not aware of. And many neighborhoods are left without electricity and water for days or weeks after a natural disaster. If your home is unsafe, seek shelter at a local disaster center, hotel, or friend's home.
- **If you are concerned about health issues,** try to make contact with your doctor. If you have an urgent need but can't reach your health care provider, go to a local hospital or contact the American Red Cross agency in your area, which may have health care providers on hand.
- **Get help coping with the emotional aspects of a natural disaster.** Many people suffer from depression or anxiety after a natural disaster. These events can bring back painful memories or make people afraid. If you are having trouble coping, seek professional help. Local and federal relief agencies, including the Federal Emergency Management Agency, may have mental health counselors who can help.
- **As you begin to cope with the aftermath of the disaster, remember the importance of maintaining routines.** When so much of your everyday life has been disrupted, it is especially helpful to maintain as much of a normal routine as possible. This is worth some extra effort, because maintaining order and routines helps you cope more effectively with all the work of recovering from a disaster.

Getting help

There are many sources of help and support available to you after a natural disaster. Local and federal relief agencies may offer shelter,

food, transportation, loans for rebuilding, and legal and mental health counseling. Below you'll find a list of helpful agencies and their contact information.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)

Register for disaster assistance by calling:

1-800-621-FEMA (3362)

www.fema.gov

The American Red Cross

1-800-HELP-NOW (1-800-435-7669)

www.redcross.org

National Hurricane Center

<http://www.nhc.noaa.gov>

The Salvation Army

www.salvationarmyusa.org