



# Coping With Natural Disasters: Earthquakes - The Aftermath

If you have family or friends that have been in a recent earthquake, you are likely to feel frightened and helpless at this time. Communications have been disrupted, and it is very worrisome to have so many unanswered questions about the safety of loved ones. As communications are re-established, you may have the chance to speak to earthquake survivors who feel confused and need direction. Read this article for ideas and strategies for coping after an earthquake, and be sure to share this information with your loved ones involved in the earthquake.

## Caring for Yourself After a Disaster

In the aftermath of an earthquake, there are many pressing issues to take care of, but it is essential that your first priority be your own safety—and that of your family. Safeguard yourself and your family by taking the following tips into consideration:

- Listen to a portable radio for information on shelters, helpful resources and safety advisories.
- Stay out of and away from damaged buildings. Return home only when authorities say it is safe. Children should be constantly supervised.
- Be alert for potential hazards. Take extreme care when moving in an area damaged by an earthquake. It is possible that shattered glass, splintered wood or other sharp objects will be strewn around.
- Cooperate with authorities. Whether you're asked to relinquish phone lines, keep off emergency roads or given other directions, do your best to comply.

- Use caution when traveling. Earthquakes can create weakened roads or bridges, and broken or downed live power lines.
- Be cautious with food. When electricity is out, refrigerated foods can spoil quickly; throw out any food that is questionable.
- Be cautious with drinking water. Earthquakes can cause contamination of local reservoirs. Radio reports will typically notify residents if tap water is safe to drink.
- Remember to help others who may require special assistance—infants, the elderly, and people with disabilities.

## Stress Reactions and Relief After a Disaster

Experiencing a disaster like an earthquake can result in extreme emotions including stress, helplessness, fear, irritability, anger, and depression. You may also suffer from nightmares, shock, loss of appetite and the inability to concentrate. All of these reactions and feelings are normal; but if you do not address them, you can jeopardize your health. If you or a family member is unable to cope, do not hesitate to get help. Have realistic expectations and goals, and be patient with yourself.

## Helping Children Cope

Natural disasters are stressful for everyone, but children may need extra help with coping. A child's reaction will



vary depending on his or her personality and age. Infants may become more irritable or fearful. Toddlers and preschoolers will probably feel frightened, insecure or helpless, and may display regressive behavior such as clinginess or separation anxiety. School-aged children may become preoccupied or fearful and experience stress-related physical symptoms such as headaches or stomachaches. Preteens and teenagers may feel invincible; display reckless behavior; withdraw; or become hostile. Since children do not have the same coping skills as adults, they will need your love, support, guidance and reassurance. The following tips may help you help your child:

- Answer any questions with simple, honest, accurate answers. If you don't know the answer, tell your child you will try to find out.
- Talk to your child about your own fears and stresses so he or she understands, but do not unnecessarily scare him or her with too many details.
- Don't make false promises; instead, set realistic goals.
- Make time for your child and pay extra attention to his or her needs.
- If you are in a shelter, reassure your child that your situation is temporary.
- Encourage your child to play (in safe areas).
- Maintain regular routines if at all possible. For example, even in a shelter, you can still have a bedtime routine such as reading or story telling before your child goes to sleep.