



CIGNA Behavioral Health
A Business of Caring.

COPING WITH LOSS DUE TO FIRE

The loss of one's home in a fire actually involves multiple losses. Not only a place of residence, but also many other things of value—family photo albums, heirlooms, records and documents (financial, legal, medical), one's wardrobe, books, furniture, and artwork may be lost. Less tangibly, you lose your primary place of comfort, the place you go for safety, respite and rejuvenation. Losses of such magnitude can't help but affect people in significant ways, and the more you know about reactions to loss, the better able you are to weather the inevitable period of grieving and readjustment.

Reactions to Loss: Stages of Grieving

There are recognized stages of grieving that people usually go

through after any type of loss. The first is *shock*. At this point, the mind cannot comprehend the full scope of what has happened, and people may feel like they are having a nightmare from which they will awaken. People in shock feel numb and dazed, their emotions frozen. But, shock serves a healthy purpose in that it softens the blow temporarily, assuring we won't have to face any more than we are able to cope with.

Once people move beyond shock, and the reality sets in, they often experience alternating periods of *anger*, *depression* and *hopelessness*. At this stage, people may experience tearfulness, nervousness, and insomnia, feel physically drained, can't eat,

lose interest in former activities, and neglect of personal hygiene. They may become confused and disorganized, and have difficulty making simple decisions. They may find themselves dwelling on the "what ifs" and "if onlys". Anger and bitterness can surface periodically, and can be directed at anyone perceived to have failed them in some way, or it may be unfocused and generalized.

The final stage in this process is *acceptance*. At this point, people are able to begin to let go of the hurt, sadness and anger, and find balance in their lives again. Slowly, positive feelings re-emerge and people can experience hope and joy again, if only fleetingly at first. They begin to make new plans, and their focus turns more and more to the future.

Self-Care After Loss

It is sometimes difficult to take care of yourself in the middle of a crisis, especially when your attention is on such basics as food, clothing and shelter. But, this is a time when self-care is especially critical for personal resiliency, healing and returning your life to normal. Here are some self-care strategies you may wish to consider:

- Stay away from mood-altering substances
- Get plenty of rest if you can
- Eat well-balanced meals
- Practice stress-reduction techniques; e.g. deep breathing, healthy self-talk, relaxation, meditation
- Give yourself permission to feel bad; let yourself cry
- Give yourself permission to feel good; you can have periods of joy even while coping with loss
- Make small decisions daily to get back in control of your life
- Put off major life decisions, if possible
- Lower your expectations of what you "should be doing"
- Don't isolate yourself too much; spend some time with people
- Talk about it—with friends, family, other victims, maybe even clergy or a counselor
- Get some exercise
- Take advantage of community support
- Focus on what you are thankful for in spite of your loss

Information in this document is taken from the resources cited and developed for use by the general public. It is not intended as medical/clinical advice or treatment. Only a healthcare provider can make a diagnosis or recommend a treatment plan. For more information about your behavioral health benefits, you can call the member services or behavioral health telephone number listed on your healthcare identification card.