

Surviving After a House Fire

If you are reading this then you or someone you know has had a house fire. I am sorry. This has been written to be of help for you. It comes from our experience of our daughter's family house fire. You may have a whole range of thoughts and feelings swimming around or simply be in a state of shock. This is a loss and grief reaction. Please let others help you, and I hope this may be a useful guide.

Immediate Actions

After the Fire Brigade is in attendance at your house fire;

- Inform your family and immediate friends (and landlord if you are in rental accommodation).
- Phone your insurance company, (employer, school, bank)
- Arrange to have the property secured. The Emergency Services may inform you about this.
- Consider your options of where to stay the first night, though the best option is somewhere you can stay short to medium term. Some insurance policies include emergency accommodation.
- If people offer to help in this immediate stage, ask for nightwear, toilet gear and a complete change of clothes for everyone (give approximate sizes).
- Arrange the collection of any medications your family require.
- Take pets.
- Arrange for new phones, glasses and hearing aids if required.

The Next Day

- Keep the children in their routines as best you can – this may mean delegating someone to drop the children at their schools and then collect them after school to bring them back to where you are staying. Offer lots of reassurance to the children. Allow others to support them too.
- Compile a list of your entire essential document details. *See appendix one.*
- Purchase a notebook/diary. Begin to note your conversations with the insurance company and other associated agencies. Remember to note the name of who you speak to and their contact details.
- In a separate notebook start to list the goods, vouchers, offers and kindnesses given to you. Again, note people's names and contact details (this makes it easier to ensure you thank people at a later date). *See appendix two.*
- If someone is co-ordinating help, ask them to arrange for meals for the entire household to be delivered to where you are staying for at least a week. We found this to be the most practical help of all as everyone is tired at the end of the day and there is just no energy left to be even thinking of food preparation.

If it is deemed safe some insurance companies may allow you to go to your property the following day.

- Ensure you wear facemasks and wear disposable gloves. Take torches.
- Photograph the remains of rooms in as much detail as you can (this may help you to itemise the goods in your household for your insurance contents claim).
- Photograph the remains of the garage and sheds also in as much detail as you can capture.
- You may want to record the general section layout.

Short Term Planning

- If someone offers to co-ordinate the collection of goods, accept this offer! (Some schools have the ability to do this, and may have the facilities to store goods temporarily.)
- Your insurance company may have the provision in your policy to pay for a storage unit. List what goes into storage and where, use your *appendix two* – this is essential to know where things are for your next housing. Our co-ordinator even sent out some of the “thank you’s” which was most helpful. Keep all receipts.
- Accept all offers of help – these people can help list, sort and pack clothes and goods.
- Accept all offers of goods and arrange for these to be dropped off – once sorted, any surplus goods can be given to a charity e.g. Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul, or Hospice.
- Compile a list of clothing and footwear you require and remember to include the next seasons clothes too. *See appendix three.*
- Compile a list of household chattels and goods. *See appendix four.* This list can help others to know how they can help you too.

At this stage it is essential you take care of your general wellbeing;

- Eat well, and drink water regularly.
- Take some exercise and fresh air.
- Work through some stress relieving/relaxation exercises.
- Meet with friends.

Medium Term

- There are MANY phone calls, consultations, and decisions to be made – continue to record these. Insurance companies can be very helpful but the process may be **lengthy**. You may be required to itemise all things lost, ensure you get actual prices to replace these – this can be a lengthy process but worth the effort to assess actual costs. Remember the loss adjuster/assessor is working for the insurance company.
- When you move to temporary housing or setting up back in your home there can be additional costs e.g. power, phone, and/or bond = keep some funds aside for the unexpected.
- You will need to establish what pantry and food items are needed *see appendix five.*
- Ask others to send you photos that they may have of your family (hard copy or digital).

Appendix One - Essential Document Details

[illegible]

Appendix Two – Donated Goods List (Make several copies of this sheet)

[illegible]

Appendix Three – Clothing List

Initially you will all need at least **FIVE** complete outfits (the more the better, as you are not then relying on washing and drying when you are already pressed for time). Medium term you will need to consider the change of seasons and the additional clothing required for these.

Adult (Female Size =)

- Underwear (knickers and bras)
- Socks
- Jeans/Trousers
- Skirts/Shorts
- Tea shirts
- Blouses
- Cardigan/Jersey/Sweatshirts
- Nightwear x 2
- Slippers
- Shoes

Adult (Male Size =)

- Underwear
- Socks
- Jeans/Trousers
- Shorts
- Tea shirts
- Shirts
- Jersey/Sweatshirts
- Nightwear x 2
- Slippers
- Shoes

Children (Size = Size = Size = Size =)

- Underwear
- Socks
- Trousers/Track pants
- Skirts/Shorts
- Tea shirts
- Blouses/Shirts
- Cardigan/Jersey/Sweatshirts
- Nightwear x 2
- Slippers
- Shoes

If it is winter you will require warm clothing and outer layers of jackets/coats. Remember to include extra footwear e.g. Gumboots.

Collect as many clothes hangers as possible.

Appendix Four – Household Chattels and Goods

Bedrooms

- Bed Queen plus Mattress Protector, Under blanket, Sheets sets x3, Duvet inner, Duvet cover and Pillows.
- Bed Singles plus Mattress Protectors, Under blankets, Sheets sets x3 for each bed, Duvet inners, Duvet covers, and Pillows.
- Bedside cabinets (and lamp).
- Chest of drawers for each person.
- Clothes hangers.
- Mirror.
- Clock/Radio.
- Children's toys, books and games

Bathroom/Laundry

- Towel sets (at least one set per number of people in the family). Bath mats x 2.
- Toothbrush holder.
- Washing machine. (Dryer). Drying racks.
- Laundry basket. Pegs.
- Ironing board. Iron.
- Vacuum cleaner. Bucket and mop. Broom. Dustpan and brush.
- Storage bins. Rubbish bin.
- Toilet brush.

Kitchen

- Fridge/Freezer.
- Microwave. Toaster. Kettle/Jug. Food processor.
- Set of pots and pans. Set of cooking utensils. Roasting dish. Casserole dishes.
- Set of Stainless steel bowls. Baking tins. Kitchen scales
- Chopping boards. Set of knives. Cutlery set. Cutlery tray. Vegetable peeler and knife. Can opener. Garlic press. Lemon juicer. Grater.
- Dinner set.
- Sets of glasses.
- Salad bowls and servers. Jugs.
- Sets of storage containers.
- Tea towels. Oven mits. Cookery books.

Dining/Lounge

- Lounge suite. (Coffee table).
- Television.
- Office table and chair. Bookcase. Computer and printer. Camera.
- Dining table and chairs.
- Clock.

Miscellaneous

- Assemble a First Aid Kit.
- Put some goods together for a stationery drawer.
- Make up a Sewing Kit.
- Picnic gear

Appendix Five – Pantry Products

Storage containers.

Baking basics

- Sugar, Brown sugar, Icing sugar, Cornflour
- Flour, Baking powder, Baking soda, Vanilla
- Cocoa, Chocolate chips, Coconut, tin of Condensed milk, tin of Coconut milk,
- Dried fruits of apricots, dates, raisins, sultanas, currants
- Nuts of peanuts, almonds, walnuts
- Ground spices of cinnamon, cloves, ginger, nutmeg

Herbs /Sauces

- Salt and pepper, Stock
- Dried herbs of cumin, oregano, marjoram, paprika, rosemary, thyme
- Granulated garlic, Mustard
- Vegetable oil. Vinegars.
- Tomato sauce, Soy sauce, Fish sauce, Worcestershire sauce
- Mayonnaise

Canned Goods

- Tin cream corn and whole corn
- Tins of Spaghetti, tins of Baked Beans
- Tins of tomato puree, tin of tomato paste, tins of whole tomatoes
- Tins of tuna
- Tin fruit

Rice/Grains

- Rice
- Pasta (spaghetti, penne)
- Couscous

Cereals/Snacks

- Breakfast cereals
- Rolled oats
- Honey, jam, 'Marmite'
- Crackers, biscuits

Drinks

- Tea, Coffee, Milo
- Fruit juice

Perishables

- Milk, butter, cheese, eggs,
- Potatoes, onions, garlic, carrots, broccoli, cauliflower, apples
- Bread, pizza bases
- Meats

Miscellaneous

- Paper towels, Baking paper, Cling wrap, Plastic bags
- Detergent, Pot mit and pot scrub, Dish cloths and tea towel