



Planning for Emergencies: A Family Guide

What to consider when preparing your family a disaster or other emergency

What Kinds of Emergencies?

Emergencies are events--natural or human-generated--that disrupt daily life to a high degree. They may have already resulted in death and damage or they may threaten death, injury, and damage.

At the family level, most emergency preparation is similar regardless of the cause of the emergency. Think about past emergencies in your area. Hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, and tornadoes suggest the kinds of disruptions communities and families may face.

Hazardous material spills may present different challenges. Terrorist attacks can take many forms. The idea is to know what's likely and what's not. By making your plan based on your specific risks, your family can be better prepared.

What kinds of events are common in your area? If you are not sure, check with the local Red Cross or your city or county emergency management or emergency preparedness office or with firefighters and police officers in your area.

So how do you plan? First, think about your goals. For most people, the prime goal is knowing that all family members are safe and as secure as possible against harm. Most families want to be together if that is at all possible. A second goal is having what you need to make it through the immediate disaster period. The "Making Sure You Have What It Takes" checklist can help with that. A third goal might be communicating with out-of-town family about your family's safety. What other goals should your family's plan address? Talk with other adults in the family. Talk with teens and children. Find out their concerns and help ensure that your disaster preparations address those concerns where possible. Remind everyone that you're being preventive and prepared--not running scared.

Second, develop a plan with these goals and the following outline in mind. Your family's plan is probably going to have some unique features. But there are some basics.

- **Who:** Who is included in this plan? Relatives across town? Close friends? Just immediate family members? What about family pets?
- **Where:** Home is where the heart is, and it's probably going to be the center of your family plan. But what are the back-up locations? It might be the nearby house of worship, the closest elementary school, or a close friend's home. The point is to decide on the back-ups and make sure everyone knows what and where they are.
- **What:** What will trigger the emergency plan? An official announcement? Notification from authorities to people in your immediate area? A call from one of the adults to all the others involved? A call from a child's school? Remember to think about how other family members will be notified.
- **When:** What time frames help shape your plan? Does everyone work or go to school within a few miles? Then people should be at home fairly quickly. If some people have a long commute, they may be held up by emergency conditions. How do you cope if the emergency is projected to last several days?
- **Why:** Family members should understand, to the best of their ability, why the plan includes certain provisions. Why must children stay at school under certain circumstances, for example? Why might a parent stay out of town if on travel during an emergency?
- **How:** This gets down to the steps of the plan. Think through key points. Who will take what responsibilities? Where will emergency supplies be kept? How will supplies be updated? What about the Family Link-Up Plan--how will it be updated? What different steps are involved in a "shelter in place" situation versus an evacuation order? What if there is no information from authorities? What training do family members need? How often will the family review its plan?

Strategies and Tactics To Consider

Some of the strategies and tactics to consider in developing a plan include the following:

- Make sure everyone has basic family phone contact numbers and business or school addresses. Remember that email may work when phone circuits are overloaded.
- Identify places to meet both near the house and farther away. Set a priority order about which place to go to, why, and when.
- Establish an out-of-town contact that everyone can call and report to. Make sure the contact agrees, and make sure everyone knows how to dial that long-distance number. Consider prepaid calling cards for everyone's convenience.
- Keep vehicles in good working order and keep the gas tank at least half full at all times. Remember, if power fails, gas pumps won't work!
- Stockpile a disaster kit in advance and refresh supplies at least every six months. Consider seasonal changes in your family's needs. For example, you might want to have more blankets available in the fall and winter season.
- Know how to turn off safely the water, electricity, and gas that serve your home.
- "What if?" your plan. What if a major roadway is blocked? What if power is out and the car is low on gas? What if mass transit is unavailable? Where will these family members go? How will they communicate that they are safe?
- What local situations in your neighborhood or community might result in evacuation? How should family members pack for this situation? What about care for pets in cases where they cannot be in shelters?
- Find out about plans that link with yours. What plans do children's schools have in place? What plans are in place where you and other adults work? Make sure school and workplace have updated contact information for all members of your family. What are local authorities' plans for your area?
- How might your family work together with neighbors to prepare and survive an emergency? Are there neighbors with special needs? Who could help them? Talk together; share the skills and equipment you could make available to each other. Devise ways you could help each other's families if the need arises. Third, revisit your plan.
- Review the plan as a group every few months. Consider holding family rehearsals or drills if you live in areas where there might be little warning of an emergency.
- Don't forget to update the plan to account for new schools children attend, changes in job locations or employers, and the like.