



A program of the American Academy of Pediatrics



Four Steps to Prepare Your Family for Disasters

Families come in all sizes. They include children, parents, grandparents, pets, and anyone else who may live in the same house. A disaster plan should include all the needs of each family member. True family readiness is achieved when a family has prepared and planned together.

It takes time to put together a disaster plan. Kids can be involved in each step with age-appropriate activities. Include children in family preparedness discussions and decisions.

Many families say getting “disaster ready” was a lot easier than they thought. Follow 4 simple steps to get disaster ready: build a kit, make a plan, be informed, and get involved.

1. Build a kit

Assemble a supply kit of things you may need in case of an emergency—for example, flashlights and extra batteries if you do not have power, bottled water if you are stuck in your home and may not have power or water. Also, keep a supply kit in your car in case your car breaks down or you have to stop to shelter in a disaster.

Check your kits at least once every 6 months. Items may need to be replaced or updated. For example,

- Replace expired food.
- Replace items children may outgrow, such as diapers and clothing.
- Update personal and medical records. If you have copies of important documents at home, make sure to give a copy to a trusted person in another region and to save any details that you can in your phone or in a Web-based system (or the cloud).

Visit online resources such as Ready.gov, RedCross.org, and HealthyChildren.org for more information about what to include in a supply kit.

SPECIAL NEEDS

If you have a child with special health care needs, you may want to make your child a “go bag.” It may be a bag your child takes to school each day. You can keep the special bag with your family kit, but it should be easy to carry. Fill in the Emergency Information Form for Children With Special Needs and save a copy on

your phone. See the American Academy of Pediatrics Children and Youth with Special Needs web page for more information.

PETS

Pets are part of the family too. The Humane Society provides tips for making a disaster plan for your pets.

2. Make a plan

The plan must include communication, transportation, and reunification. You should consider steps to take if you have to leave your home quickly or if you need to shelter for an extended time.

COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

- Talk with your kids! Talk about how to prepare for disasters that could happen in your area. Teach them what the different danger or warning signals sound like—for example, fire alarm, tornado siren. Show them where you keep a list of contacts, such as family members, emergency contacts, doctor and veterinary offices, and the pharmacy.
- When they are old enough, teach your children their parents’ names, phone numbers, and addresses. In a disaster, kids might need to know how to text or find family using social media or email too.
- Consider using the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) “Backpack Emergency Card” or a child ID card. Place a copy of this card into your child’s kit or backpack. (Your state may have a process to obtain a child ID card.)
- Teach your child about 9-1-1 and when to call or text this number. If your area uses a number different than 9-1-1, make sure everyone knows it.
- Choose an out-of-state family check-in member and make sure everyone in the family knows how to contact him or her.
- If you fear you may become separated from your child in an active disaster, write your phone number onto your child’s forearm with permanent marker (or provide your child with an emergency bracelet). Do this even if your child knows your phone number. When kids are stressed-out or hurt, they may not be able to recall a phone number.

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- Decide on local and out-of-state meeting places and make sure all family members know where to meet if you become separated.
- During a disaster, cell phone communications may not work. Make sure all family members know how to text or make a plan to inform members through one social media platform.

TRANSPORTATION PLAN

- Know your evacuation routes as well as alternative routes. If possible, find a friend's or relative's place that is far away (hundreds of miles) where you and your family could stay. Print directions to this location and keep these in your car and in your disaster kit.
- Identify the shelters in your area. Find out which shelters can suit your needs, such as medical, family, or pet. Use the Red Cross shelter map to find a shelter near you.

REUNIFICATION PLAN

- Create a child ID card or "Backpack Emergency Card" (refer to the resources listed in the Communications Plan section on the other side of this publication).
- Decide on a family watchword or phrase to prevent your children from going with a stranger.
- Let child care or school staff know who can pick your child up if you are not able to do so. Let your kids know about this backup plan. Find out how the child care facility or school will notify you about a meeting place if they need to evacuate.
- Identify a family meeting place outside the home—for example, neighbor's house, grocery store, library.
- Take and store photographs using your phone of all forms of ID cards for your family. Consider having hard copies on you at all times, in case you misplace your phone. Keep pets collared or chipped or both. Pets tend to get scared during times of chaos and will act out of character and potentially run away.

3. Be informed

As part of your plans, consider working with others to create networks of neighbors, relatives, friends, and coworkers who will help each other in an emergency.

- Talk with your neighbors. Learn who has special skills, such as doctors, nurses, and firefighters. Find out who has special needs and may need extra help, such as people who are elderly or have disabilities.
- Buy a battery-operated or weather radio for your home.
- Talk with your kids about the difference between a weather watch and a warning so that they understand the different messages the radio or sirens will provide.
- Download the Red Cross Emergency app to your phone. For older kids who have their own phones, download it to their phones also. The app is free and will send text alerts when there is a watch or warning for your area. You can also use it to see what emergency shelters have been set up after a disaster.
- Show your kids where the smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms are located in your home. Review with them what they need to do for each alarm if the alarm goes off.
- Learn about environmental risks in your area and plan for each risk. Risks may include tornados, floods, hurricanes, or earthquakes.
- Use the CDC Ready Wrigley resources to help prepare your kids for disasters.
- Check with your child's school or child care program to find out what plans are in place to help kids stay safe.

4. Get involved

Have your kids help you or watch when you test the smoke alarms in your home. If you can, do this each month. If you can't check each month, check at least every 6 months when reviewing your kit. This gives your kids a chance to hear what the alarms sound like. Smoke alarm batteries should be changed once a year. Always do this on the same day, such as January 1. Make it one of your family safety resolutions for each New Year.

- Show your kids where the fire extinguisher is and how to use it.
- Talk with your kids' teachers. What are the school disaster plans? Do they drill them? Volunteer at the school if you can. The more involved you are with your children's school, the more you will understand its practices.
- Volunteer with your homeowners association or neighborhood crime watch. Ask what they do to prepare for or respond to disasters.
- Check with your local fire department to see whether they offer Community Emergency Response Team training.
- Take Red Cross first aid and CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) classes.
- Review and practice your Family Disaster Plan regularly.

RESOURCES FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Organization and Website	Resources ^a
American Academy of Pediatrics www.aap.org	• Children and disasters
American College of Emergency Physicians www.emergencycareforyou.org	• Emergency Information Form for Children with Special Needs
CDC www.cdc.gov	• "Backpack Emergency Card" • Ready Wrigley resources
Department of Homeland Security www.ready.gov	• Community Emergency Response Team • Supply kit ideas
HealthyChildren.org	• Supply kit ideas
Humane Society www.humanesociety.org	• Pet disaster-preparedness kit
Ident-A-Kid https://identakid.com	• Ident-A-Kid app
Red Cross www.redcross.org	• CPR classes • Emergency app • Shelter map • Supply kit ideas
Save the Children www.savethechildren.org	• How to prepare kids for emergencies

^a Search for these terms on the website.

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Are You Prepared for Disasters? Family Readiness Kit.
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From Your Doctor

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