



PREPARING YOUR KIDS FOR EMERGENCIES

As you plan ahead for an emergency, it is important that you discuss potential hazards with your children. Make sure they understand what might happen and what actions they can take during an emergency. Emergencies are scary situations, but by preparing your children for them, you can reduce their fear and stress during an actual emergency.

In a disaster, children will look to you and other adults for help as how you react to an emergency gives them clues on how to act. If you react with alarm, your child may become more scared. They see your fear as proof that the danger is real. If you seem overcome with a sense of loss, your child may feel their losses more strongly.

Feelings of fear are healthy and natural for both adults and children. But as an adult, you need to keep control of the situation. When you are sure that danger has passed, concentrate on your child's emotional needs by asking them how they are feeling about what happened. Having children participate in the family's recovery activities will help them feel that their life will soon return to "normal." Your response during this time may have a lasting impact.

Reducing Fear in Uncertain Circumstances

Disasters often strike quickly and without warning. They are frightening for adults, and can be traumatic for children, especially if they don't know what to do. During a disaster, your family may have to leave your home and depart from your daily routine. Children may become anxious, confused, or frightened. It is important to give children guidance that will help them reduce their fears.

Children's fears may also arise from their imagination, and you should take these feelings seriously. A child who feels afraid is afraid. Your words and actions can provide reassurance. When talking with your child, be sure to present a realistic picture that is both honest and manageable.

Helping kids cope

Children in particular can feel stress deeply, and may react in different ways. The key to helping your children cope is simply by being there and making them feel safe.

- Take their fears seriously and tell them that it's okay to be scared.
- Explain the events as best you can and acknowledge what's frightening about what happened.
- Tell your kids what you think and feel. Doing so helps them feel less alone if they know that their feelings are similar to yours.
- Maintain familiar routines, like mealtimes and regular bedtime hours.
- While parents can play a huge role in helping children deal with anxiety, it may be helpful to talk to a professional such as a psychologist or social worker, who can help children understand and cope with their emotions.

Make a Plan

- Develop your evacuation procedure as a family so your children understand where you are going and why.
- Develop a communications procedure as a family by writing down all the phone numbers you and your kids would need, as well as how to get in touch with each other if you are separated. Identify trusted people to assist your children until your family reconnects.
- Let your kids be involved in every process of planning.

Get a Kit

- Put your emergency kits together as a family.
- Make it fun. Create a list together, then have a scavenger hunt to gather supplies for the kit.
- Discuss why it is important to have each item in the kit.
- Include toys and activities in your kit.

Practice

- Practice monthly what you might do as a family in different emergency situations, so children do not forget.
- Let your kids ask questions and give their opinions regarding your plan's effectiveness.
- The more they talk about it, the more likely they will be ready when something happens, and the more comfortable they will feel.

Where to Find Additional Information

- Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA): <https://www.ready.gov/kids>
- American Red Cross: <http://www.redcross.org/prepare/location/home-family/children>
- SesameStreet.Org: <https://sesameworkshop.org/topics/emergencies/>
- Ready Army: www.army.mil/ready

It's up to you. Prepare strong. Get an emergency supply kit with enough supplies for at least three days, make an emergency plan with your family and be informed about what might happen. These fact sheets are intended to supplement predetermined plans and policies. Follow state, local, installation and command guidance related to threats and hazards.

