

# READY or not?

## Emergency Considerations for Children

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AN EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS NEWSLETTER • ISSUE NUMBER 4

### FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

Parents strive to provide their children with physical and emotional security. One of the most important things a parent can do is TALK about the importance of preparing for possible disasters and emergencies where you live and where you travel.

The time you spend with your children talking about family preparedness and emergency response will pay high dividends if you experience severe weather, an earthquake, or other emergency. Involve your children in the process and assign them responsibilities. This will help your children feel less vulnerable and more confident.

Some parents commute long distances from their homes while other parents work closer to their homes. However, almost all families follow a regular pattern of activities. Routines provide a feeling of safety and stability in our lives—getting up, eating breakfast, going to work, day care or school, coming home, or going to afternoon or evening activities, and finally going to bed.



While our actions in an emergency would hardly seem to be routine, preparation for them can help families to deal with them in a calmer manner. Remaining as calm as possible helps individuals better handle the emotional and physical needs of the entire family.

Family preparation plans will depend upon the ages of their children.

#### *Children of all ages should:*

- Participate in preparing for possible disasters
- Be trained to use 911
- Have individual responsibilities

#### *Parents should:*

- Teach children how to recognize danger.
- Make sure your child knows what alarm and warning systems sound like.
- Have children memorize their family name, address, and telephone number. Children who are not old enough to memorize the information could carry a small index card that lists emergency information.

**DANR Publication ANRPO14.** The Emergency Preparedness Newsletter series was developed as a resource for individuals and families. Each newsletter addresses a specific topic to help you prepare for the next "natural disaster". Topics include "Planning for an Emergency"; "Safety"; "Food and Water"; "Considerations for Children"; "Finance and Insurance"; and "Clean-up".

# PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID



Children depend upon daily routines to provide stability in their lives. When emergencies or disasters disrupt the normal routine, children are very likely to become anxious. Younger children may regress and begin wetting or fussing. These behaviors are normal.

In a disaster, the child will look to parents and other adults for help. How you react to an emergency gives them clues about how to act. If you react fearfully, a child may become even more alarmed. Children see our fear as proof that the danger is real.

Children's fears also may stem from their imagination. You should take these feelings seriously. A child who feels afraid is afraid. Parents and other adults need to use words and actions that provide reassurance to the child.

Feelings of fear are healthy and natural for adults and children. As an adult, you need to keep control of the situation. When you are sure that the immediate danger has passed, concentrate on your child's emotional needs by asking the child to explain what's troubling him or her. Your response during this "problem time" may have a lasting impact.

## *Be aware that after a disaster, children are most afraid that—*

- The event will happen again.
- Someone will be injured or killed.
- They will be separated from the family.
- They will be left alone.

## *Parents or other adults must take time to talk to the child:*



- Listen to what the child says about what has happened. Don't interrupt, correct or show impatience. Allow for the child to ventilate his/her thoughts, feelings, and fears.
- Be decisive and calm but be firm. Following a traumatic experience, the child may perceive the adult differently due to the stress of the situation. Try to avoid letting your own concerns interfere with your relationship with the child.
- Talk calmly to the child no matter how upset you or the child may be. Bend down or kneel so that you are at their eye level and are not forcing them to look up. Hug or touch the child in a soothing manner. Reassure your children that they will not be left alone and, as their parent, you will do everything you can to protect them.
- Try to explain what has happened and what may happen later—such as aftershocks. Don't lie or make promises that you will not be able to keep.

# READY or not?

## Family Recreation Kit

Be prepared for the next natural disaster. An *Emergency Family Recreation Kit* can relieve tension, stress, and children's boredom during long periods of isolation and waiting. Choose age appropriate games and activities. You can fit a variety of materials into a milk carton or another slightly larger sized box. Make at least two kits; you might want to keep the smaller size in the trunk of your car, and a larger one with your other emergency supplies.

### *Suggested Items to Include:*

Small Puzzles	Dice
Playing Cards	Children's Books
Crayons	Pads of Paper
Pencils & Marker Pens	Jacks
Small Balls	Play Dough
Cribbage Board	Gum
Children's Card Games	Game & Activity Books

Remember rotate items from time to time; this provides opportunities for new activities in the home as well as checks the freshness of the recreation materials. For example, dry play dough or dry marker pens are not much fun to use!

## FAMILY TIME ACTIVITY

On the reverse of this sheet is an activity sheet to prepare as a family. Fill out and discuss the appropriate sections.

For the youngest children, you may wish to use pictures or photographs instead of the words to designate the appropriate helper-agency or person. Pictures give children who have not yet learned to read an opportunity to participate and insure better recognition when a crisis arises.

All aspects of parenting provide the child with a basis to build like experience. Preparing for emergencies is not something parents enjoy talking about or getting ready for, but it is an essential life skill that needs to be extended through family communications.



Follow instructions described on the other side of this sheet under *Family Time Activity*  
POST IN A PROMINENT PLACE NEAR THE PHONE

# *Did 911 for Emergencies*

## *Emergency Information*

Our Family Name \_\_\_\_\_

Our Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

Our Address \_\_\_\_\_

Our Town \_\_\_\_\_

Nearest Cross Street \_\_\_\_\_

Our County \_\_\_\_\_

Mother \_\_\_\_\_

Father \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Child Care Provider \_\_\_\_\_

# BASIC EMERGENCY SKILLS FOR CHILDREN



Children can be taught basic emergency skills from very young ages. Practicing the skills may seem like a game but will be useful should they prove necessary in a time of disaster.

Begin to teach the use of the 911 emergency number around the age of two. Start by making a simple card or small chart which illustrates the numerals 911. Help the child locate the matching numbers on the telephone pad. Telephones with large sized touch pads and numerals might be helpful for the very young child.

Older children can be taught more about the concept of emergency telephone calls. They will understand the numbers and can remember 9-1-1. Explain that this number must only be used in times of emergency. Children should also be taught their full name, address and age. As skills develop, add phone number and parents' name to the list of memorized items.

Children should also be taught to identify danger signals such as the smell of natural gas, the smell of smoke, and the sound of the smoke alarm.

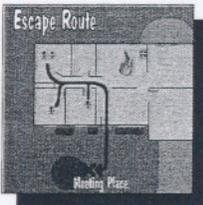
Work together to assemble Emergency Kits (described in Issue 1 of this newsletter series). These kits can be made for the family, for school, work or for the automobile. Don't forget to pack games, puzzles, and books to help pass the time if you must leave home for another shelter. As you prepare the kit, discuss the purpose and use of each item.

## *In most emergencies, there are four basic ground rules —*

- *Stay Calm*
- *Get Assistance*
- *See What's Wrong*
- *Begin First Aid Measures*

Only in a fire should the child be taught to escape FIRST and then to seek assistance. Occasionally, this might also be true where the disaster makes the dwelling obviously unstable and dangerous.

Review basic safety rules with children. Role plays are often the best way to do this. Practice escaping from imagined disaster situations—fallen electric lines, or smelling of natural gas.



As children mature, help them to increase their emergency preparedness skills. For example, teach them how and when to turn off the utilities.

# AFTER THE DISASTER — TIME FOR RECOVERY



Immediately after the emergency situation, try to reduce your child's fear and anxiety.

## *Keep the family together*

While you look for housing and assistance, it may seem easier to leave your children with relatives or friends. Instead, keep the family together as much as possible.

## *Encourage children to talk*

Let children talk about the disaster as much as they want. Encourage them to share their feelings. Listen to what they are saying. If possible, make some time for the whole family to be present during this sharing time.

## *Include children in recovery activities*

Give children chores that are their responsibility. This will help children feel that they are part of the recovery. Having a task will help them understand that everything will be all right.

## WANT MORE INFORMATION?

*Coping With Children's Reactions to Earthquakes and Other Disasters*; developed by San Fernando Valley Child Guidance Clinic, 9650 Zelzah Avenue, Northridge, CA 91325, Federal Emergency Management Agency Leaflet # 48, 1991

*Family Emergency Plan, Volume 1*; by Barry and Lynette Crockett, Publisher's Press, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1990

*Helping Children Cope With Disaster*; Federal Emergency Management Agency Leaflet # ARC-4499, September 1992

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