

Creating a Family Disaster Plan

An earthquake, flood, fire or severe storm can strike at any time — and you and your family members may not be together when it does.

How will you find each other if separated? What about household members who have medical conditions? And what if your cell phones or networks are out of power?

Crafting an emergency plan before a disaster hits gives you time to discuss your family's needs and circumstances, review possible scenarios and decide on best options together. Schedule a time when the whole family can participate. You may need one or two additional meetings to finalize all the details.

Make a plan of action

Smart planning entails talking through a number of situations and “what-ifs.” Start by brainstorming around the following questions (and remember that the coronavirus may affect some answers).

1. What natural disasters are we most likely to experience?
2. How will we receive emergency [alerts and warnings](#)?
3. What are the escape or [evacuation](#) routes from our house?
4. What is our [shelter](#) plan?

If your family is separated

Re-opening across the country means parents may be going back to worksites and kids back to school buildings. Are there other locations, such as after-school programs, childcare, gyms or volunteer sites that family members regularly attend? Consider those when answering the following:

1. If separated during an emergency, where should we meet near our home?
2. If meeting near home is impossible for some or all family members, what's our meeting place?
3. If we are separated, who is our emergency contact outside of our immediate area?

Specific needs of family members

Remember to tailor your plan to address any particular needs of/by family members, such as:

1. Medical needs, including prescriptions and equipment
2. Dietary needs
3. Medical conditions, disabilities or functional needs, especially those requiring devices and equipment
4. Language barriers or limitations
5. Ages of all household members, including school-aged children
6. Pets or service animals
7. Religious and cultural considerations

Document the plan

After discussing the above, it's time to get it all down on paper. Be sure to capture the following as well:

1. Contact information for each household member.

2. Who's responsible for what during the disaster? Tasks might include things like retrieving the disaster kit, evacuating pets, and fielding disaster updates and alerts.
3. Create a personal network of friends, family and neighbors for things you might need help with.
4. Make sure you have one or more out-of-town contacts for emergencies.
5. Numbers for important contacts such as utilities, financial companies, childcare and caregivers, veterinarians and insurance companies.

Share & practice

During an emergency, cellular networks and Wi-Fi may be unreliable, and computers and phones may be lost or out of power. In these cases, having a paper copy of your family disaster plan can save precious time, minimize stress and prevent unnecessary emergencies. So, make sure each family member has a copy and carries it with them in a purse, backpack or work bag (here's a template [plan](#) that fits in your wallet). You may also want to share it with out-of-town contacts. Have regular family meetings to review the plan and practice. Finally, do a thorough review every 6 months or so, to update information or responsibilities.

Resources

Check out these resources to get your plan disaster-ready.

- Disaster plan templates [here](#) (American Red Cross) and [here](#) (FEMA).
- Stay current on coronavirus updates at this [CDC page](#).
- Articles on disaster preparation [checklist](#), disaster prep for [your pets](#), emergency kit [essentials](#), and [tips to revise your plan](#) during the [coronavirus](#).

The perfect time to make a plan is right now. Getting all your family members on board and in-the-know sooner rather than later will ensure that you're all ready when you need to be.

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