

Creating an Emergency Preparedness Plan

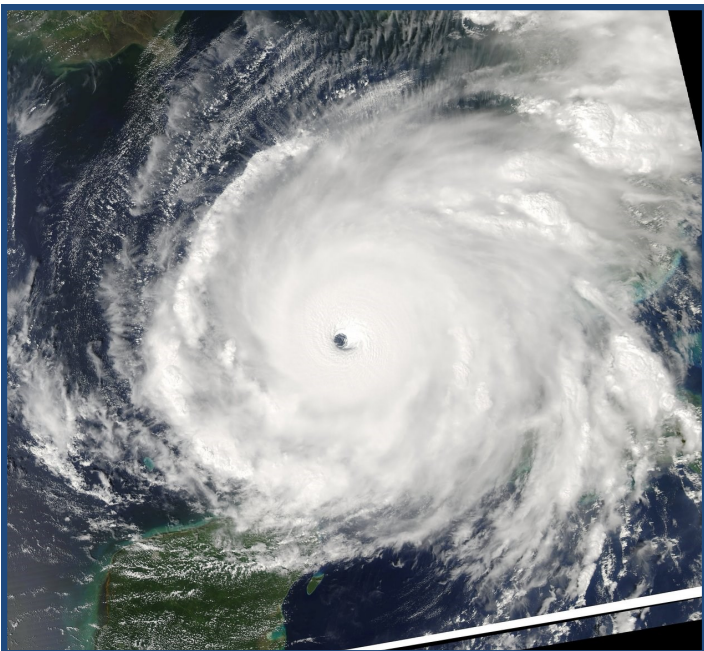
The best way to keep children safe and healthy in an emergency is by having a response plan in place in advance. If your program doesn't have one already, then you will need to develop an emergency preparedness plan. Creating an emergency preparedness plan is a step-by-step process.

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Here's what you need to do:

- **Step 1:** Create an emergency preparedness team. Consider including administrators, caregivers, parents, local emergency responders (e.g. police officers, firefighters, EMTs), community partners, and anyone else who might have useful input in developing your plan.
- **Step 2:** With your team, identify different types of disasters that could potentially affect your program, based on your location, climate, etc. Think about natural disasters (e.g. hurricanes, tornadoes, floods, wildfires, extreme heat, winter storms), industrial disasters (e.g. hazardous materials spills, nuclear plant emergencies), health emergencies (e.g. flu pandemics, measles outbreaks), and intentional acts of violence (e.g. terrorism, intruders in the program facility such as a distraught parent who has access codes).



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- **Step 3:** Work with your team to decide what you need to do to respond to each of the emergency scenarios you identified. Most emergencies fall into one of two categories: evacuation emergencies (i.e. an emergency such as a fire that requires you to leave your facility and relocate children to an alternate location) and shelter-in-place emergencies (i.e. an emergency such as a tornado that requires you to relocate children to a safe space within your facility). Write an evacuation plan and a shelter-in-place plan, and include any specific details you might need to remember if a particular scenario arises. For example, a chemical spill nearby is probably a shelter-in-place emergency. In this case, you'd follow your standard shelter-in-place plan, but you might also add a note that if this happens, you need to tape plastic sheeting over the windows to keep out fumes. Your plans should be specific; state who, where, what, when, and how the emergency preparedness plan needs to happen. Consider assigning each type of emergency a code word. For example, you might indicate an intruder by announcing "code black", a fire could be "code red", a gas leak could be "code blue", and a tornado could be "code green". Codes let staff know exactly how to respond but also help to keep children calm. Announcing "code black" is less chaotic than shouting, "Gun! Lockdown!"
 - **Step 4:** Post plans throughout the facility. At minimum, every classroom should have a relocation plan posted showing where children will go during an evacuation and during a shelter-in-place emergency. Let parents know how you'll keep them informed during a disaster as well.
 - **Step 5:** Gather the supplies you'll need. It's important to have emergency response kits prepared before a disaster happens. Include copies of important child records, such as medical release forms and parents' contact information.
 - **Step 6:** Practice, practice, practice! If no one knows what's in your plan, then it is useless. Make sure every caregiver knows where to go and what to do in different types of emergencies. It's also important to give children opportunities to practice evacuations and shelter-in-place procedures, such as fire and tornado drills. When a disaster occurs, adults and children will be less likely to panic if they have routinely practiced what they are supposed to do.



Sources:

Administration for Children and Families – Office of Head Start (2014). "Emergency Preparedness" retrieved from <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/tta-system/health/ep>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2014). "Emergency Preparedness and Response: Schools and Child Care Centers" retrieved from <http://emergency.cdc.gov/children/schools.asp>

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