A Reference for Parents

# Helping Your Child Prepare For and Cope with Disasters

Disasters, both natural and man-made, can trigger many emotions for parents and children. It's normal to feel some anxiety, stress, and sadness during these times. However, by preparing for emergencies as a family, you and your children may be better able to handle these feelings. The following tips can help your family stay strong during an emergency and bounce back more quickly afterward:

1. **Be prepared.**
   Build a family emergency kit, create a family disaster plan, and practice your plans. Share needed information, like who will pick your child up in case that you can't, with your loved ones and child's school or day care. Make sure you know the emergency plans and policies at your child's school or day care.

2. **Stay calm and confident.**
   Your children will look to you for comfort and support. Staying calm and confident will help your children in a stressful time.

3. **Learn and share the facts.**
   Share what you know about the situation in a way your child will understand. Share small amounts of basic information with younger children, and more detailed information with older children and adolescents.

4. **Acknowledge and calm fears.**
   Let your child know that it's ok to be scared, and that you are there for them if they want to talk.

5. **Monitor your children's exposure to media.**
   News coverage of a disaster, often filled with graphic images, can scare and confuse children. Consider limiting TV and internet time to help calm yourself and your family.

## Things You Can Do With Your Children to Prepare For Emergencies

1. Make a list of emergency phone numbers to carry with you or put next to every phone.
2. Create an emergency card for each child. Include:
   - His/her full name
   - Your home address
   - Your home phone number
   - Your work number
   - An out-of-state contact
3. Teach them how and when to call 9-1-1.
4. Let them know who will pick them up in case you can't.
5. Explain how drills and other school rules help them stay safe at school.

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## Build an Emergency Kit

Building a family emergency kit with your children will help them feel more secure before and during a disaster. In addition, they will be confident and able to use the items within the kit when needed.

- Use an easy-to-carry container, such as a duffel bag or backpack
- Ask your children to think of items they would like to include, such as books, games, or nonperishable snacks.
- Involve your children in refreshing your kit every six months.

**10 Essential Kit Items**

- ☐ Water
- ☐ Food (for people and pets)
- ☐ Cash and important documents
- ☐ Clothes
- ☐ Flashlight and batteries
- ☐ First-aid kit
- ☐ Medicines you take regularly
- ☐ Wireless radio
- ☐ Toiletries
- ☐ Tools

**For more information:**

**LA County Dept. of Public Health**
http://1.usa.gov/1ORaxw

**American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)**
http://bit.ly/gWxQYv

## Ways to support your children:

**For Infants to 6-Year-Olds**

- Stick to routine as much as possible
- Provide extra support and comfort
- Encourage expression through drawing, play, and stories
- Avoid separation

**For 7- to 10-Year-Olds**

- Include your child in disaster planning activities (emergency kit, communication plan)
- Listen to your child's version of the disaster
- Encourage sharing of feelings through talk and play
- Give your child specific, yet manageable tasks, to restore normalcy

**For Preteens and Teenagers**

- Provide extra attention during and following a disaster
- Be there for your child without forcing communication
- Encourage your child to talk with their peers
- Encourage involvement in community preparedness and recovery activities
- Maintain as normal a routine as possible
- Review your family emergency kit and family communication plan together

If your child continues to feel stress, anxiety, or sadness weeks after a crisis, or if these emotions get worse, think about talking with a pediatric mental health professional.
For more information, call:

**Access Center 24/7 Helpline:**
(800) 854-7771 or visit: http://lamentalhelp.com

## Additional Resources:

| FOR PARENTS: | FOR CHILDREN: |
|---|---|
| **Red Cross**<br>http://www.redcross.org/ | **Ready.Gov (FEMA)**<br>http://www.ready.gov/kids/ |
| **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention**<br>http://emergency.cdc.gov/preparedness/ | **Sesame Street: Let's Get Ready!**<br>http://www.sesamestreet.org/ready |
| **Ready Classroom**<br>http://readyclassroom.discoveryeducation.com/#/map | **A Children's Primer on Emergency Preparedness (LA County Department of Public Health)**<br>http://publichealth.lacounty.gov/eprp/media/childrensbook.htm |