

# Be Ready for Disaster

If a disaster strikes, will you be prepared? What if you are at work or school? What if your family members are in other parts of town? Will everyone know what to do? Will you know how to get in touch?

Disasters can happen without warning. That's why your family must be prepared. Knowing what to do can save time and save lives during a disaster. There are simple ways to keep family members safe, even if they are separated when a disaster happens.

Every family should have a disaster plan. Planning helps reduce fear and worry. Adults and children need to work as a team to get prepared.

## Learn the Dangers

Certain disasters are expected in certain places. The West Coast has earthquakes. The Gulf Coast gets hurricanes. Find out which disasters are common where you live.

**Call to find out.** One way to find out is by calling your local emergency management office. Another way is to contact your local chapter of the Red Cross. Look up their numbers in the phone book.

When you call, ask to talk to someone about personal disaster planning. Ask what dangers are common in your area.

**Ask about the disaster plan for your city or town.** Find out what you and your family should do. Ask at your school and at your workplace. Family members might need to follow different plans depending on where they are when a disaster happens.

**Ask what to do.** Find out about local warning systems. Some areas use sirens, phone calls, or public broadcasts to warn people about disasters. Ask what you should do if you hear a warning. Should you stay or leave? Should

you go to a certain place that will be safe?

Find out ways to reduce the risk of harm to you and your family.

Suppose you're told that hurricanes are common in your state. Ask if the area where you live and work tends to flood. If so, find out what you can do to protect your home against flood damage. Take notes.

You will also need to think about less obvious disasters. What sorts of mishaps could occur in your neighborhood? Do you live or work close to a busy highway? What should you do if a tanker truck overturns and spills toxic chemicals on the road?

You may not be able to prepare for every disaster. But you can prepare for many dangers that may happen where you live. If you are ready for one event, you will be better prepared to cope with another.

### Take four basic steps to help your family cope with disasters:

- 1 Talk about dangers.
- 2 Have a family disaster plan.
- 3 Prepare supplies.
- 4 Follow your plan.

This guide provides tips to help you each step of the way. The information comes from the Home Safety Council.

## Talk About Dangers

Once you know about likely dangers, talk to your loved ones about them. Hold a family meeting. Perhaps discuss what you've learned with friends and neighbors.

Don't be afraid to talk about disasters. Some people worry that such talk will frighten children. Or they worry that it might cause fear in their community.

The opposite is true. People feel less afraid when they can talk openly about dangers. Setting up a plan to deal with disasters can help people feel more confident in knowing what to do.

Adults should tell children that disasters are events that can disrupt your routine. Here is more advice on what adults should say to children:

Explain that disasters can damage your home and community. Say that disasters can sometimes make the power go out.

Give examples of disasters that could happen where you live. Explain what to do in case of fires, storms, floods, and other common disasters.

Let children speak freely. Kids should be allowed to ask questions. Try to answer with clear, direct facts.

Tell children how they can prepare and protect themselves. Help them learn the signs of likely disasters. Adjust your advice to match youngsters' ages and skill levels.

Even very young children should learn when and how to call 9-1-1 or a local emergency number. Post emergency numbers by each phone and explain when to use each number. Draw pictures for children who can't read.

Tell children that in a disaster there will be many people who can help them. Explain what a teacher, trusted neighbor, firefighter, police officer, or Red Cross worker might be able to do.

It's important for people of all ages to discuss disasters. Knowing the facts will help people protect themselves and plan ahead.

