



**Dear Parent or Educator,**

News stories of disaster regularly make headlines around the globe. As you've watched others deal with these emergencies, you may have wondered what would happen if a disaster struck closer to home.

For parents or teachers of young children, the thought is even more troubling. How would you and your children cope? Perhaps you've already experienced a disaster — what would you do differently next time? The answer to both questions is clear. Be prepared.

Children can learn about fire, earthquakes, floods, tornados and other disasters, as well as how to protect themselves.

Work through each section with children to make sure they understand the concepts and learn important safety messages, discussing the key points and action steps to take. You may want to review this information before meeting with children. This information ends with a "quiz" that can help you find out if they learned the information. From time to time, quiz children again and practice key steps to help them remember what to do.

Children are wonderful at adapting to situations when they know what to expect. By creating a family disaster plan, you can help children be ready to deal with emergencies.

# Emergencies

Even very young children can be taught how and when to call for help.

## Action Steps for Adults

- ▶ Help children recognize the warning signs for the disasters that could happen in your community. You can get this information from your local emergency management office or American Red Cross chapter.
- ▶ Tell children that in a disaster there are many people who can help them. Talk about ways that an emergency manager, Red Cross volunteer, police officer, firefighter, teacher, neighbor, doctor or utility worker might help following a disaster.
- ▶ Teach children how and when to call for help. Check the telephone directory for local emergency telephone numbers. If you live in a 9-1-1 service area, teach children to call 9-1-1. At home, post emergency telephone numbers by all phones and explain when to call each number.
- ▶ Even very young children can be taught how and when to call for emergency assistance. If a child can't read, this emergency telephone number chart has pictures that may help him or her identify the correct number to call. As you explain each picture, have the child color the symbol on the chart.
- ▶ Take a first aid and CPR course. These are critical skills, and learning can be a fun activity for older children. Contact your local office of emergency management, American Red Cross chapter or hospital for information.
- ▶ At home, ask an out-of-state friend to be your family "check-in" contact. After a disaster, long-distance telephone lines often remain in service even when local lines are down. Tell children to call this "check-in" contact if they are separated from the family in an emergency. Help them memorize the telephone number, or write it down on a card they can keep with them.

# Emergency Phone Numbers

My Family Name: \_\_\_\_\_

My Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

My Address: \_\_\_\_\_

My Town: \_\_\_\_\_



Ambulance



Fire



Police/Sheriff



Mother



Father



Other

# Fire

**Fire is the disaster that families are most likely to experience.**

Talk with children about fire safety, and practice these activities with them.  
Keep in mind that children under age five are at highest risk.

## Safety Messages for Kids

- ▶ “Matches and lighters are tools, not toys. These tools help adults use fire properly. If you see someone playing with fire, tell an adult right away.”
- ▶ “If a fire starts in your home or you hear the smoke detector alarm, yell ‘Fire!’ several times and go outside right away. If you live in a building with elevators, use the stairs. Never try to hide from fire. Leave all your things where they are. Once you are outside, go to your meeting place and then send one person for help.”
- ▶ “If your clothes catch fire...stop, drop and roll. Stop what you are doing, drop to the ground, cover your face and roll over and over until the flames go out. Running will only make the fire worse.”

## Action Steps for Adults

- ▶ Show children how to crawl low, under the smoke to escape.
- ▶ Explain that they should feel a door before opening it.
- ▶ If the door is cool, open it slowly.
- ▶ If the door is hot, find another way out.
- ▶ If they cannot get outside safely, instruct them to hang a sheet outside a window so firefighters can find them.
- ▶ Practice “stop, drop and roll” with children. Explain that running away will only make the fire burn faster.

## At home:

- ▶ Choose an outside meeting place, such as a tree, street corner or mailbox. Make sure it will be a safe distance from heat, smoke and flames. Tell children to go directly to this meeting place in case of a fire. This plan will help you know quickly if everyone got out safely.
- ▶ Make sure that children understand that once they are outside, they should stay outside. Children are often concerned about the safety of their pets, so discuss this issue before a fire starts.
- ▶ Find two ways to escape from every room and practice getting out of your home during the day and at night. Chart these escape routes on your own “home escape plan.” If you have an escape ladder, show kids where it’s kept and how to use it.
- ▶ Practice your home escape plan at least twice a year. Quiz children every six months so they’ll remember what to do and where to meet.
- ▶ Install smoke detectors on every level of your home, especially near bedrooms. Clean and test them monthly, and change the batteries at least once a year. Make sure children know what your smoke detector sounds like.
- ▶ Check electrical wiring in your home. Fix frayed extension cords, exposed wires or loose plugs.
- ▶ Make sure your home heating source is clean and in working order. Many home fires are started by faulty furnaces or stoves, cracked or rusted furnace parts and chimneys with creosote build-up.

# Natural Disasters

**Disasters can strike quickly and without warning. While a disaster is frightening for adults, it can be traumatic for children if they don't know what to do.**

## **Help children understand the concept of a disaster...**

- ▶ Explain that nature sometimes provides “too much of a good thing” — fire, rain, wind, snow. Tell them that a disaster is when something happens that could hurt people, cause damage or cut off utilities such as water, telephones or electricity.
- ▶ Give examples of several disasters that could happen in your community. To get this information, contact your local office of emergency management or local American Red Cross chapter. Ask what disasters are most likely to happen and request information on how to prepare for them.
- ▶ Talk about typical effects that children can relate to, such as loss of electricity, water and telephone service.
- ▶ Explain that when people know what to do — and practice in advance — everyone is better able to handle emergencies.

**That's why we need to create a family disaster plan.**

# Thunderstorms

**Lightning always accompanies a thunderstorm.  
And lightning can strike the same place twice!**

Thunderstorm is a storm with lightning caused by changes in air pressure. Severe thunderstorms can bring heavy rains (which can cause flash flooding), strong winds, hail and tornados. At any given moment, nearly 1,800 thunderstorms are in progress over the face of the earth! The sound of thunder can be especially frightening for young children. Take the “scariness” away by teaching them what to expect during a thunderstorm and how to be safe.

## Safety Messages for Kids

- ▶ “If you see or hear a thunderstorm coming, go inside a sturdy building or car.”
- ▶ “If you can’t get inside...or if you feel your hair stand on end, which means lightning is about to strike...hurry to a low, open space *immediately*. Crouch down and place your hands on your knees. Move away from tall things like trees, towers, fences, telephone lines or power lines. They attract lightning. Never stand underneath a single large tree out in the open because lightning will hit the highest point in an area. And stay away from metal things that lightning may strike, such as umbrellas, baseball bats, fishing rods, camping equipment and bicycles.”
- ▶ “If you are boating or swimming, get to land *immediately*.”
- ▶ “Lightning can cause electric appliances, including televisions and telephones, to become dangerous during a thunderstorm.
- ▶ Turn off the air conditioner and television, and stay off the phone until the storm is over.”

## Action Steps for Adults

- ▶ Explain what to expect during a thunderstorm. Describe the loud thunder and flashes of lightning. Make sure children understand that they can stay safe.
- ▶ Talk about the danger signs; dark, towering clouds or distant lightning and thunder can signal an approaching thunderstorm.
- ▶ Practice the “crouch down” position with children.

# Tornados

**Tornados are nature's most violent storms — they can devastate an area in seconds.**

Tornado appears as a rotating, funnelshaped cloud, striking the ground with whirling winds of up to 200 miles per hour. A tornado spins like a top and may sound like an airplane or train. Most tornadostravel a distance of about 10 miles, although “tornado tracks” of 200 miles have been reported. Tornados can happen just about anywhere in the United States.

## Safety Messages for Kids

- ▶ “Wherever you are, if you hear or see a tornado coming, take cover right away.” “If you’re in a house or apartment building, go to the basement or storm cellar. If there is no basement, go to the middle section of the building on the lowest level — and go into a bathroom or closet, if possible.”
- ▶ “Get under something sturdy, such as a heavy table, and stay there until the danger has passed. Use your arms and hands to protect your head from falling or flying objects.”
- ▶ “If you’re outside, in a car or in a mobile home, go immediately to the basement of a nearby sturdy building. If there is no shelter nearby, lie flat in a low spot. Use your arms and hands to protect your head. If you hear or see water, move quickly to another spot.”

## Action Steps for Adults

- ▶ With children, find some safe places in your home or classroom. Make sure these places are away from windows and heavy furniture that could tip over. Also, show children an example of a safe place outside.
- ▶ Know the terms used on the radio or television that warn of possible approaching tornados:
  - Tornado Watch:** *Weather conditions are right for tornados to develop. A watch does not necessarily mean a tornado will develop.*
  - Tornado Warning:** *A tornado has been sighted and is dangerous. This is the time to go to a safe place and listen to a battery-operated radio for instructions.*
- ▶ Find out what warning system is used in your community.
- ▶ If you live in a single-family home in a tornado-prone area, find out how to reinforce an interior room on the lowest level of your home (such as the basement, storm cellar, bathroom or closet) to use as a shelter.

# Hurricane

**A hurricane is a tropical storm with winds reaching 74 miles per hour or more.**

Hurricane winds blow in a large spiral around a relatively calm center known as the “eye.” The “eye” is generally 20 to 30 miles wide, and the storm may spread outward as far as 400 miles. As a hurricane approaches, the skies will begin to darken and winds will increase. As a hurricane nears land, it can bring heavy rains, strong winds and extremely high tides.

## Safety Messages for Kids

- ▶ “During a hurricane *watch*, we’ll listen regularly to the radio or television for official instructions.”
- ▶ “If officials announce a hurricane *warning*, they may ask us to leave our home as soon as possible to be safe. We’ll take our disaster supplies kits and go to a shelter or to \_\_\_\_\_. We’ll call our “check-in” contact so someone will know where we’re going.” (Note: For information on how to assemble a disaster supplies kit, please refer to the “Disaster Supplies Kit” section.)

## Action Steps for Adults

- ▶ Know the terms used on the radio or television that warn of potential hurricane conditions:
  - a) Hurricane Watch:** A hurricane *may* strike your area within 24-36 hours.
  - b) Hurricane Warning:** Hurricane conditions are expected in your area within 24 hours. Coastal areas may need to be evacuated.
- ▶ Talk about what you would do in an evacuation. Consider where you would go and what you would take.
- ▶ Keep a battery-operated radio in case power goes out.
- ▶ Measure and cut plywood to cover your windows.

**If a hurricane is coming, your family may need to leave home and go to a safer place.**



# Floods

**Floods are the most common and widespread of all natural hazards.**

Even very small streams, gullies, creeks, culverts, dry streambeds or low-lying ground that may appear harmless in dry weather can flood.

## Safety Messages for Kids

- ▶ "If you come upon flood waters, stop. Turn around and go another way. Climb to higher ground." "Stay away from flooded areas...even if it seems safe, the water may still be rising. Never try to walk, swim or dive into the water because it may be moving very fast." (NOTE: Less than six inches of fastmoving flood water can knock people off their feet, and two feet of water will float a car.)
- ▶ "If you are in a car, get out immediately and move to higher ground."
- ▶ "Watch out for snakes in areas that were flooded."
- ▶ "Never play around high water, storm drains, ditches, ravines or culverts."
- ▶ "Throw away food that has come into contact with flood waters...eating it could make you very sick."

## Action Steps for Adults

Know the terms used on the radio or television that warn of potential flooding conditions:

### A. Flood/Flash Flood Watch:

Flooding or flash flooding may occur within the designated WATCH area — be alert.

### B. Flood/Flash Flood Warning:

Flooding or flash flooding has been reported or is imminent — take necessary precautions at once.

- *Find out if you live in a flood plain. If you do, call your local emergency management office or American Red Cross chapter to learn what types of supplies should be stored to protect your home from floodwater.*
- *Know the elevation of your property in relation to nearby streams and dams so that you will know if forecasted flood levels will affect your home.*

**If you see flood waters, move away from them. Go to a higher place.  
Never play near or try to swim in flood waters.**

# Winter Storms

**A winter storm can range from several inches of snow over a few hours to blizzard conditions that last several days.**

Winter storms can last several days and be accompanied by high winds, freezing rain or sleet, heavy snowfall and extreme cold. People can become stranded on the road or trapped at home, without utilities or other services. Most of the United States is at some risk from winter storms.

## Safety Messages for Kids

- ▶ “The best way to stay safe in a snowstorm is to stay inside.”
- ▶ “If you go outside to play after a snowstorm, dress in many layers and wear a hat and mittens. Come inside often for warm-up breaks.”
- ▶ “If you start to shiver a lot or get very tired...or if your nose, fingers, toes or ear lobes start to feel numb or turn really pale...come inside right away and tell an adult.”

## Action Steps for Adults

- There are ways to dress children in cold weather that will keep them warmer. Many layers of thin clothing are warmer than single layers of thick clothing. One of the best ways to stay warm is to wear a hat; most body heat is lost through the top of the head. Keep hands and feet warm too. Mittens are warmer than gloves. Covering the mouth with a scarf protects lungs from extremely cold air.
- Teach children how to watch for signs of frostbite and hypothermia. A loss of feeling and a white or pale appearance in fingers, toes, nose or ear lobes are symptoms of frostbite. Uncontrollable shivering, slow speech, memory lapses, frequent stumbling, drowsiness and exhaustion are symptoms of hypothermia. If you suspect frostbite or hypothermia, warm the child and seek immediate medical assistance.
- Children should also avoid overexertion. Cold weather puts an added strain on the heart.
- In your home, have available some kind of emergency heating equipment and fuel so you can keep at least one room of your home warm. If your furnace is controlled by a thermostat, and the power goes out, you will need emergency heat.
- If you are trapped in your car during a snowstorm, stay there. Leave the car only if help is visible within 100 yards. To attract attention, hang a brightly colored cloth on the radio antenna and raise the trunk. Turn on the car's engine for about 10 minutes each hour. Run the heater and turn on the dome light when the car is running. Keep the exhaust pipe clear of snow and open a downwind window slightly for ventilation.

**When there is snow outside, bundle up in lots of layers of clothing and wear a hat. Ask an adult if it's okay to play outside — and come inside often for “warm-up” breaks.**

# Earthquakes

**Earthquakes can happen anywhere, anytime.**

An earthquake is a sudden, fast shaking of the earth. One can strike without warning — causing fires, explosions and landslides. Earthquakes happen when rock that is below the earth's surface breaks and shifts. People in all states are at some risk from earthquakes.

## Safety Messages for Kids

- ▶ **“If you're indoors during an earthquake**, drop, cover and hold on. Get under a desk, table or bench...hold on to one of the legs and cover your eyes. If there's no table or desk nearby, sit down against a wall. Pick a safe place where things will not fall on you, away from windows, bookcases or tall, heavy furniture.”
- ▶ “Wait in your safety spot until the shaking stops, then check to see if you are hurt. Check the people around you too. Move carefully and watch out for things that have fallen. Be ready for smaller earthquakes called aftershocks.”
- ▶ “Be on the lookout for fires. Earthquakes can cause fire alarms and fire sprinklers to go off. If you must leave a building after the shaking stops, use the stairs, not the elevator.”
- ▶ **“If you're outside in an earthquake...stay outside.** Move away from buildings, trees, street lights and power lines.
- ▶ “If you are in a car, stay there with your seatbelt fastened.” Crouch down and cover your head.”

## Action Steps for Adults

- ▶ Help children understand what to expect in an earthquake and how to protect themselves.
- ▶ With children, find safe places in every room of your home or the classroom. Practice “drop, cover and hold on”...getting
- ▶ under a table or other sturdy object. Look for safe places inside and outside of other buildings where you spend time.
- ▶ Explain that it is dangerous to run outside when an earthquake happens because falling objects can hurt people.
- ▶ Tell children to be prepared for aftershocks — smaller earthquakes that can happen over a period of weeks (and sometimes months) after the first earthquake. Be sure they know to go to a safe place during aftershocks.
- ▶ At home, bolt down water heaters and gas appliances. Place large or heavy objects and fragile items (such as glass or china) on lower shelves. Securely fasten shelves to walls. Brace or anchor high or top-heavy objects.

**If you're indoors during an earthquake, drop, cover and hold on.**

# Disaster Supplies Kit

## Assemble Disaster Supplies Kits with Your Children.

Following a disaster, basic services — electricity, water, gas, telephones — may be cut off for days. Or, you may have to evacuate at a moment's notice. You probably won't have time to shop or search for the supplies you'll need. Gather the supplies you'll need to deal with the situation **now, before disaster strikes.**

### Action Steps for Adults

Plan an activity with children to put together disaster supplies kits.

#### At home, your kits should contain:

- \_\_\_ One gallon of water per person per day
- \_\_\_ Non-perishable food: ready-to-eat canned meats, fruits and vegetables; canned juices, milk and soup; sugar, salt and pepper; high energy foods such as peanut butter, jelly, crackers, nuts, health food bars, trail mix; comfort foods such as cookies, hard candy and sweetened cereal. Don't forget a non-electric can opener!
- \_\_\_ A first aid kit that includes your family's prescription medications (ask your doctor about proper ways to store medicine)
- \_\_\_ Emergency supplies and tools including a battery-operated radio, flashlight and plenty of extra batteries
- \_\_\_ One change of clothing and footwear per person, and one blanket or sleeping bag per person
- \_\_\_ Sanitation supplies: toilet paper, soap, personal hygiene items
- \_\_\_ Special items for infant, elderly or disabled family members
- \_\_\_ An extra set of car keys and cash, traveler's checks and a credit card

Store enough supplies to last at least three days. Keep them in sturdy, easy-to-carry containers such as backpacks, duffle bags or covered trash containers. Store your kits in a safe, convenient place known to all family members — preferably in a cool, dry, dark place. Keep a smaller version of this kit in the trunk of your car. You should also keep important family documents in a waterproof container.

#### In the classroom, your kit should contain:

- class roster
- first aid kit
- battery-operated radio
- work gloves
- flashlights
- extra batteries
- non-perishable food items; crackers, cookies, trail mix
- plastic trash bags
- other items as your school requires

Ask children to help you remember to keep your kits in working order: change the water and food every six months; replace batteries at least twice a year. You might have them make calendars or posters with these dates marked on them. And ask children to think of items that they would like to include in their own disaster supplies kit, such as books or games or appropriate non-perishable food items.

**We can keep supplies that will help us if a disaster happens.  
Put together a disaster supplies kit today!**

# Family Disaster Plan

**Practice your plan so everyone will remember what to do!**

- ▶ **Hold emergency escape drills.**
- ▶ **Test smoke detectors and change the batteries.**
- ▶ **Keep disaster supplies kits up-to-date.**
- ▶ **Quiz children every few months to help them remember what to do.**

**Here are some questions you can ask right now to make sure they've learned key concepts:**

1. What will you do if you're in your room and smell smoke or hear the smoke detector go off?  
Where will you go?
2. What will you do if you see dark clouds and hear thunder?
3. How might you know that a tornado is coming? If a tornado is coming, where will you go?  
What will you do to protect yourself?
4. If we are told that a hurricane is coming, what are some of the things we will do to get ready?
5. Why should you stay away from flood waters?
6. What will you do if your clothes catch fire?
7. When you play outside in the snow, what will you do to make sure you don't get too cold?
8. If the earth starts to shake, what will you do?
9. Who will you call for help in an emergency? Where can you find these telephone numbers?
10. What are some things you want to put in your disaster supplies kit?
11. What will you do if you see a friend playing with matches?

**Practice your plan so everyone will remember what to do!**