

ARE YOU READY?



Preparing your child for emergencies

Experiencing a disaster is hard enough for adults. Just imagine what it must be like for children. Luckily, getting prepared for an emergency isn't an adult-only affair. Involving the kids in your family's preparedness activities can be key to helping them stay safe and overcome their fears.

Have a conversation

Talk with your children about the kind of emergencies that can happen in your community and why preparing ahead of time is so important. Chances are pretty high that your child knows that emergencies can happen — in fact, in a world of round-the-clock news coverage, your child may already feel worried or anxious about a disaster happening where you live. Encourage your children to talk about any fears they may have.

Reassure your children that while an emergency may be unlikely, getting prepared will help keep them and the family safe. Discuss the types of things that can happen during an emergency, such as losing electricity or evacuating, and discuss how the family will prepare to address such occurrences. Give examples of the types of disasters that can happen and what such disasters can cause. For instance, if your community is susceptible to tornadoes, teach your child about a tornado's warning signs and the dangers it presents, such as flying debris and downed power lines. While these are certainly scary scenarios for children, the more they know, the better they'll be able to cope before, during and after a disaster happens.

In addition to talking about family preparedness plans, talk to your children about community preparedness too. Let them know that your community is ready to react to a disaster — examples of this can include warning systems, evacuation routes and shelters. Also, tell them that there are many people who will be on hand to help in an emergency, such as police officers, firefighters and health officials.



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Prepare together

Nothing can build confidence like being involved – and getting prepared for an emergency is no different. When creating your household emergency plan and putting together your emergency stockpile kit, get the kids involved. For example, take them with you when shopping for emergency supplies and explain why the items you buy will help them stay safe in an emergency.

Make sure your children are completely familiar with the emergency plan – this means holding practice drills and even celebrating improvements. As part of your plan, designate an emergency meeting place that everyone is familiar with in case you and your loved ones are separated when an emergency happens.

Also, designate an emergency contact person. Keep in mind that it may be a good idea to designate a family friend or relative who doesn't live in your community, as it is sometimes easier to call long distance, rather than locally, in the wake of an emergency. In addition to helping your children memorize the name and number of the emergency contact, make sure they know other important numbers too, such as your work and cellphone numbers as well as how and when to call local emergency responders. Consider posting these phone numbers near your home phone or writing them down on a card that they can carry in their backpacks or wallets.

Become familiar with your school's emergency plans and talk about such plans with your children. Let them know that schools can often be a community's safest place during an emergency and that school officials know how to contact you in case of an emergency.

Finally, talk to your children about the disasters they learn about on TV and online, and how your family can lend a helping hand to others in need.



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800 I Street, NW · Washington, DC · 20001-3710
202-777-APHA · www.aphagetready.org · getready@apha.org



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