

Prepare your Family for Disasters

Families can — and do — cope with disaster by preparing in advance and working together as a team. Create a family disaster plan including a communication plan, disaster supplies kit, and an evacuation plan. Knowing what to do is your best protection *and* your responsibility.

- Find out what could happen to you
- Make a disaster plan
- Complete the checklist
- Practice your plan

Find out what could happen to you

Contact your American Red Cross chapter or local emergency management office — be prepared to take notes:

- Ask what types of disasters are most likely to happen. Request information on how to prepare for each.
- Learn about your community's warning signals: what they sound like and what you should do when you hear them.
- Ask about animal care after disaster. Animals other than service animals may not be allowed inside emergency shelters.
- Find out how to help elderly or disabled persons, if needed.
- Next, find out about the disaster plans at your workplace, your children's school or daycare center, and other places where your family spends time.

Create a disaster plan

Meet with your family and discuss why you need to prepare for disaster. Explain the dangers of fire, severe weather, and earthquakes to children. Plan to share responsibilities and work together as a team.

Discuss the types of disasters that are most likely to happen. Explain what to do in each case.

Pick two places to meet:

1. Right outside your home in case of a sudden emergency, like a fire.
2. Outside your neighborhood in case you can't return home. Everyone must know the address and phone number.



Ask an out-of-state friend to be your “family contact.” After a disaster, it's often easier to call

long distance. Other family members should call this person and tell them where they are. Everyone must know your contact's phone number.

Discuss what to do in an evacuation. Plan how to take care of your pets.

Families should develop different methods for communicating during emergency situations and share their plans beforehand with all those who would be worried about their welfare. Options for remaining in contact with family and friends if a disaster strikes include:

- Phone contact with a designated family member or friend who is unlikely to be affected by the same disaster.
- Email notification via a family distribution list.
- Registration on the American Red Cross **Safe and Well Website** (<https://disastersafe.redcross.org>).
- Use of the toll-free **Contact Loved Ones** voice messaging service (1-866-78-CONTACT).
- Use of the **US Postal Service** change of address forms when it becomes necessary to leave home for an extended period of time, thus ensuring that mail will be redirected to a current address.

Safe and Well Website

Following the 2005 hurricane season, the Red Cross developed the Safe and Well website (<https://disastersafe.redcross.org>), which enables people within a disaster area to let their friends and loved ones outside of the affected region know of their well-being. By logging onto the Red Cross public website (www.redcross.org), a person affected by disaster may post messages indicating that they are safe and well at a shelter, hotel, or at home, and that they will contact their friends and family as soon as possible. During large-scale disasters, there will be telephone-based assistance via the **1-866-GET-INFO** hotline for people who live within the affected areas and do not have Internet access, but wish to register on the Safe and Well website.

People who are concerned about family members in an affected area may also access the Safe and Well website to view these messages. They will be required to enter either the name and telephone number, or the name and complete address, of the person about whom they wish to get information. Red Cross chapters will provide telephone-based assistance to local callers who do not have Internet access and wish to search the Safe and Well website for information about a loved one.

Be assured that the information on the Safe and Well website is secure and that information about the locations where people are staying is not published. Privacy laws require the Red Cross to protect each person's right to determine how best to communicate their contact information and whereabouts to family members. The Red Cross does not actively trace or attempt to locate individuals registered on the Safe and Well website.

Complete this checklist

- Post emergency telephone numbers by phones (fire, police, ambulance, etc.).
- Teach children how and when to call 911 or your local Emergency Medical Services number for emergency help.
- Determine the best escape routes from your home. Find two ways out of each room.
- Find the safe spots in your home for each type of disaster.
- Show each family member how and when to turn off the water, gas, and electricity at the main switches.
- Check if you have adequate insurance coverage.
- Teach each family member how to use the fire extinguisher, and show them where it's kept.
- Install smoke detectors on each level of your home, especially near bedrooms.
- Conduct a home hazard hunt.
- Stock emergency supplies and assemble a disaster supplies kit.
- Take a Red Cross first aid and CPR class.

Practice your plan

- Test your smoke detectors monthly, and change the batteries at least once a year.
- Quiz your kids every six months so they remember what to do.
- Conduct fire and emergency evacuation drills.
- Replace **stored water** every three months and **stored food** every six months.
- Test and recharge your fire extinguisher(s) according to manufacturer's instructions.

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