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Caring for Your Family during Disaster: Being Prepared

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Caring for Your Family during Disaster: Being Prepared

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One of the most important jobs of parents is to provide a healthy, safe and secure place for their family to live. When faced with a natural or man-made disaster, this may be particularly difficult or overwhelming. Disasters are generally sudden, and most people find themselves unprepared. When disaster strikes, children sense the anxiety and tension in adults and the world around them. Like adults, children experience feelings of being out of control, scared and helpless. Unlike adults, children do not have the life experiences to help them put their problems and feelings into perspective. One of the best ways to help your child cope with potential disasters is to educate them before anything happens.



Have a Family Disaster Plan

Without a doubt, one of the best ways to help your child cope with any kind of disaster is to be prepared. According to a survey done by the American Academy of Pediatrics, many parents report that they are only somewhat prepared and know some of what to do in case of a disaster. When faced with an actual disaster situation, it is often hard to think clearly and/or make good decisions. In fact, during a disastrous situation, it may be too late. It is critical to think about safety readiness before something happens. It is also important to involve your children in the process. Many children are much more aware of world events than adults realize, and including them in creating a disaster plan will help them cope if something happens.

Create a Family Disaster Plan: Four Easy Steps

1) Know what to expect.

Find out what kinds of natural or man-made disasters are most likely to happen in your area and explain each of them to your child. Also, teach your child how to recognize danger signals (smoke detectors, fire alarms, local community warning systems) and what to do if they go off.

2) Know what to do.

Compile a list of emergency numbers and post it by all phones. Teach children how and when to call for help. Make sure your child knows two ways out of every room and at least two ways out of the house. Have practice drills so everyone knows where to go and what to do if you have to evacuate. Have a plan in place for family pets, too.

3) Know where to go.

Designate a family meeting place. Make sure there are two: one outside of your home in case of a sudden emergency and a second place outside of your neighborhood, in case you cannot go home. Also, choose a family contact person. Pick someone outside of your neighborhood, or even your state, that every family member can call for information in case you are separated. Make sure everyone knows who this person is and the correct phone number.

4) Know what to have.

Create a disaster supplies kit. Keep the items in containers that are easy to carry, such as covered trash bins, backpacks or duffel bags. According to the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the American Red Cross, necessities include:

a) WATER

Three gallons of water per person, stored in plastic containers.

b) FOOD

A three-day supply of foods that do not require refrigeration, cooking or water, such as canned meats, soups, fruits, vegetables, juice, peanut butter and jelly, energy bars, cereal, granola bars, vitamins and infant foods.

c) FIRST-AID KIT

Assorted adhesive bandages, gauze bandages, gauze pads, germicidal hand wipes or waterless alcohol-based sanitizer, antiseptic wipes, latex gloves, adhesive tape, antibacterial ointment, cold pack, small scissors, tweezers and CPR barrier.

d) MEDICATIONS

A supply of prescription drugs, as well as non-prescription drugs such as aspirin or non-aspirin pain reliever, antidiarrheal, antacid, laxative and activated charcoal. Also include sunscreen and insect repellent. Be sure to update and recycle items at least annually so that medications have not reached their expiration dates. Also, have an extra pair of eyeglasses or contact lenses if necessary.

e) TOOLS AND SUPPLIES

Items such as disposable plates, cups and utensils, battery-operated radio and extra batteries, flashlight with extra batteries, cash, utility knife, manual can opener, whistle, map of the area, duct tape, spare set of car keys, matches, and a needle and thread. Include an emergency preparedness manual such as "Are You Ready?", which is available from FEMA at 1-800-480-2520.

f) SANITATION ITEMS

Toilet paper, feminine hygiene products, liquid detergent, soap and chlorine bleach to sanitize water if contaminated.

g) CLOTHING AND BEDDING

One complete change of clothing and footwear per person, sturdy shoes, rain gear, jackets or coats, and sleeping bags or blankets.

How well you and your family manage a natural or man-made disaster will probably depend on how well you prepare in advance. Help your children cope by being calm, supportive and prepared.

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