



How to Make a Disaster Plan for Your Family

Three Methods: [General Strategies for Making a Disaster Plan](#) [Making a Family Fire Escape Plan](#) [Making a Family Flood Plan](#)

Natural and man-made disasters can strike at any time. Even with advance warning, any disaster, from a [hurricane](#), [tornado](#), or a [nuclear accident](#), can catch you off guard and put you in grave danger. A little planning and practice *before* you're in danger can help you and your family survive even the worst disasters.

Method
1

General Strategies for Making a Disaster Plan

1 Determine what disasters are the most prevalent in your area. If you live in Kansas, you don't need to prepare for a hurricane, but you'd better be ready for tornadoes. While some disasters, such as fire, can happen anywhere, the hazards you might encounter vary widely from place to place. Check with your local emergency management or [civil defense](#) office, [Red Cross](#) chapter, or the National Weather Service to get an idea of what emergencies you should prepare for.

2 Find out what you should do in case a disaster strikes. The organizations above will likely be able to advise you what to do in an emergency. They may be able to provide you with evacuation [maps](#) and information about local warning systems and emergency plans. If you can't get all the information you need from officials, research your local hazards on your own.

- Figure out, for example, what preparations you should make for a tornado or hurricane and how to survive if you're caught in a disaster, and determine the best evacuation routes on your own if need be.
- Remember, when push comes to shove, it's *your* responsibility to ensure your family is well prepared.

3 Pick a meeting spot and a way to get in contact with your family members. There's a good chance that all your family members won't be in the same place when disaster strikes, so it's important to have a predetermined rendezvous point. Choose a spot that will likely be safe and that is well away from your neighborhood, as you might not be able to make it back to your home.

4 Designate a contact person to connect your family. Designate a friend or relative as a contact person that you, your spouse, and your children can call if you can't meet up. In order to minimize the chance that the contact person will also be affected by the disaster, choose someone who lives in a distant town or in a different state. Make sure that all your family members have the contact person's phone number with them at all times.

5 Discuss disaster scenarios with your family and make sure everyone knows what to do in all the likely emergency scenarios. It's important to educate yourself on how to respond to likely hazards, but what happens to your family if they are away from you or if you're killed or injured? It's not enough for one person in the family to know what to do--everybody should know the plan.

6 Fix potential hazards in your home. Once you've identified potential disaster scenarios, thoroughly inspect your house and try to make it as safe as possible. Here are just a few examples:

- Every home should have smoke detectors and fire extinguishers. Test smoke detectors at least once a month, and replace their [batteries](#) yearly or as needed. Fire extinguishers should be recharged according to the manufacturer's instructions, and family members should learn [how to use them](#). Everyone should also know how to escape the house in the event of a fire.
- If you live in an area prone to [earthquakes](#), you wouldn't want a tall, heavy bookcase sitting right next to the baby's crib, as it could be knocked over in a quake.
- If you live near woods with the possibility of forest fires, you should clear your property of brush and high grass to create a buffer zone between your home and the fire.

7 Teach your family members basic life-saving techniques. Everyone who can learn [CPR](#) and [first aid](#) should take a certification class and keep their certification current. Adults and older children should know how to turn off gas, electricity and water if the house is damaged, and everyone should know how to detect a gas leak. Emergency numbers should be posted near phones, and even small children should be taught how to [call 9-1-1](#) or the corresponding emergency number in your country.

- Practicing how to use a fire extinguisher and checking smoke detectors are great reminder exercises to do once a year.

8 Have enough water to last you 10 to 30 days. During an emergency situation, such as an earthquake, your house may lose access to water, and you may not be able to get to the store to get more water. During a flood, you may be surrounded by water, but that water will be unsanitary and unsafe to drink. You also may not have access to drinking water.

- Plan on having one gallon (3.785 liters) per person per day. This includes drinking, food preparation, and sanitation water.^[1]
- Store your emergency water in clean, non-corrosive, tightly sealed containers.
- Keep the containers in a cool, dark place. Don't store them in sunlight or near gasoline, kerosene, pesticides, and other similar substances.^[2]

9 Assemble a disaster kit. Be prepared for emergencies with at least a three-day supply of non-perishable food and potable [water](#), and other things you might need if you have no utilities and no way to purchase supplies. Keep a smaller kit in the trunk of your car. Your kit should also include the following:^[3]

- Medical consent and history forms for each family member
- A small, waterproof flashlight with extra batteries and waterproof matches
- A small notepad and waterproof writing instrument
- A pay-as-you-go phone or cell phone solar charger
- Sunscreen and insect repellent
- Whistle and a 12-hour light stick/glow stick
- A thermal blanket/space blanket

10 Pack a first aid kit, and check it regularly. Place it in an easy to access place in your home, and make a second one to keep in your car. Medications and ointments do expire, and won't be as effective. Plan on checking your first aid kit once a year, along with the rest of your emergency supplies. If you come across anything that has expired, replace it. Your first aid kit should include an assortment of the following:^[4]

- Absorbent compress dressings and an instant cold compress
- Adhesive bandages, triangular bandages, roller bandages, sterile gauze pads, and adhesive cloth tape
- Antibiotic ointment packets, hydrocortisone ointment packets, antiseptic wipe packets, and a few packets of aspirin
- A pair of non-latex gloves, scissors, tweezers, and a non-glass, non-mercury oral thermometer
- Personal and prescription [medications](#)
- A first aid instruction booklet and a list of emergency phone numbers, including contact information for your doctor, local emergency services, emergency road service providers, and the poison help line.

11 Practice your plan. Practice makes perfect, and in a life-or-death situation, you want to respond perfectly. Periodically go over your emergency plans with your family, and update them as needed. Quiz and drill your family on important safety concepts. Do a live test with your family; make it an outing and get everyone involved. That will help you identify what works and what doesn't. You should practice carrying out your family's disaster plan at least twice a year.

12 Have contingency plans. In the event your emergency site is unavailable or other things change, it's a good idea to have an alternate plan on hand. What will you do if your contact person is away? What will you do if one of the family members is out of town? Planning for as many scenarios as possible can help increase your chances of safety.

**Method
2****Making a Family Fire Escape Plan**

1 Locate all of the possible escape routes in your home. Get everyone in your family together and walk around the house to find all of the possible exits. Don't just look for the obvious exits, such as the front and back doors, but other ones as well, such as: first-floor windows, garage doors, and any other safe methods of escape. Try to find at least two ways to get out of each room.^[5]

- Drawing a floor plan of your house and marking the exits can help you remember exactly what to do in the event of a fire.
- You should find a way to escape from all of the second floor as well as the first floor rooms.

2 Practice your escape plan at least twice a year. Each time that you practice, pretend that the fire is in a different part of the house. This way, you can run the drill several times and know which routes will minimize your exposure to the smoke and fire. You can also practice waking up the sleeping family members of the house, as though the alarm went off at night.

- Write out and draw your escape plan so everyone in your family knows exactly what to do.
- Practicing the plan in the dark, or even with your eyes closed, can help you get comfortable with your surroundings in case your vision is clouded by smoke when you actually have to escape.

3 Practice taking several safety precautions during your escape. There are several things you should know how to do as you carry out your escape plan to minimize your likelihood of being exposed to toxic smoke. Smoke and heat rise, so it will always be safer and easier to breathe as close to the ground as possible. Here are some measures that you should take:^[6]

- Practice crawling to avoid getting smoke in your eyes and lungs.
- Practice stopping, dropping, and rolling to stomp out any fire on your clothes.
- Practice touching a door with the back of your hand to know if there's fire on the other side. Start from the bottom of the door and work your way to the top, as heat rises. If the door is hot during a real fire, stay away.
- Practice sealing yourself in your home if you cannot escape. If you have no way to get out, then you should close all doors that are between you and the fire. It will take 20 minutes for the door to burn. Never seal the doors with duct tape or towels.
- Practice waving a flashlight or light-colored cloth out the window to let the fire department know where you are.^[7]
- Memorize the phone numbers to the [Emergency Services](#). You will need to call them during a real fire.

4 Have an escape ladder if you live in a multi-story house, and practice using it. You should be prepared with escape ladders that you can place in or near windows to give yourself another escape route. Learn how to work the ladders for your drill so you'll be prepared to use them in the event of an emergency. You should learn how to use them from the second story windows, if there is no other method of escape from those windows. The ladder should be kept near the windows, in a location that is easy to reach.^[8]

5 Have a fire extinguisher at home, and know how to use it. You should have one on each floor of your house, and inspect it yearly. Bigger is better when it comes to fire extinguishers, but make sure that you can easily carry and maneuver it.^[9] There are three types of fire extinguishers intended for home use: Class A, Class B, and Class C. It is also possible to buy a combination fire extinguisher as well, such as Class B-C or Class A-B-C. You can get them at most home improvement stores.^[10]

- A Class A fire extinguisher is intended for ordinary materials like cloth, wood and paper.
- A Class B fire extinguisher is meant for combustible and flammable liquids like grease, gasoline, oil and oil-based paints.
- A Class C fire extinguisher will put out electrical fires, caused by appliances, tools, and other equipment.

6 Pick a meeting place that is a safe distance away from your home. Once a family member escapes the house, he or she should run to a meeting place that is at a safe distance from your home while not being too far away. This can be your neighbor's front lawn, your mailbox, or a light post. Everyone should meet at this spot once

they've escaped so you know that everyone has made it safely once you do a headcount.^[11]

- The meeting place should be marked on your escape plan.

7 Make your children comfortable with the escape plan. Your children should not be scared of the fire and should see the drill as a form of practice. Practicing the drill with your children may also help them the dangers of fire, and make them less likely to play with it.

- Children should practice the escape routes with an adult so that they don't attempt anything dangerous, like escaping from a second-story window.
- Children should always be paired with an adult during the escape plan so they aren't alone.

8 Make sure your home is ready for fire safety. Check that you have a smoke alarm in every room, and that all of your doors and windows can be opened easily. This includes popping the screens out. You should also make sure that your street number is visible from the road, a minimum of 3 inches in height, and a contrasting color. This way, the firemen find your home easily, and get to it as quickly as possible.^[12]

- It would be even better if you had a smoke detector outside each bedroom door in the hallway as well as in each stairway.
- Remember to replace batteries in the smoke detector every year. It would be a good idea to test the smoke detector during this time as well, to ensure that it is functioning properly.
- If your doors or windows have security bars, they should have emergency release levers so they can be opened right away.
- Make sure that every family member sleeps with their bedroom door closed. It takes 20 to 30 minutes for a door to burn, which can provide valuable escape time.

Method
3

Making a Family Flood Plan

1 Contact the county planning department to learn about your community's emergency plans for floods. The department will tell you if you are in an area that is prone to flash floods or landslides; it's important to know what to expect before you begin planning. You can also find out the warning signals, evacuation routes, and locations of emergency shelters that are used in your community. This will influence your family's flood plan.^[13]

2 Make an escape plan in the event of a flood. You and your family need to discuss what you will do to escape if there is a flood in your community. What will you do if everyone in your family is at home? What will you do if everyone in your family is spread out across the city? Having as many plans as possible can help you find the best methods of escape.^[14]

- Having an out-of-state relative or friend as your contact person in case your family is separated increases your chances of being reunited. Everyone in your household should know the name, address, and phone number of this person.

3 Ensure that your family knows what to do if you are under a flood watch or warning. If you are under flood watch or warning, then your family should be prepared to gather your emergency supplies and to listen to the local radio or TV station for updates on what to do. You should also gather your outdoor possessions, such as trash cans, grills, and lawn furniture, and tie them down securely. Lastly, you should turn off all of the utilities if it looks like you need to evacuate. Here are some other things you should do, in case you are forced to evacuate or stay:^[15]

- Fill your water containers with enough drinking water to last you 10 to 30 days. Fresh water may become unavailable for long periods of time, and you may not be able to get to the store to buy some.
- Sanitize your sinks and tubs and then fill them with clean water so you have them on hand. This way, if you are stranded and the water is shut off, you will have fresh water on hand. Flood water is not sanitary.
- Fill your car's tank with gas and put your emergency kit in your car. If you don't have a car, then make arrangements for transportation.
- Put your important documents, such as medical records, your insurance cards, and your ID cards, in a waterproof bag.
- Find a shelter where you can put your pet, if you have one. Make sure that you have a leash/crate/carrier, extra

food, medications (if needed) and shot records.

- Keep an ear out for disaster sirens and signals.

4 Know what to do if you have to evacuate. If you are given an evacuation order, then you should listen and get out of your home as soon as you can. Trust that the authorities know what they're doing and that you'll be out of harm's way once you leave. Your family should know what to do if you have to evacuate because of a flood and should be prepared to act. Here are some tips to follow before and when you evacuate:^[16]

- Take only the most important items with you.
- Turn off your gas, electricity, and water, if there's time.
- Disconnect your appliances.
- Follow the evacuation routes given to you by the authorities.
- Don't walk across highly flooded areas.
- Continue listening to the radio for updates.
- Head to a shelter or a friend's home. Make sure that this friend does not live in an area where evacuation is mandatory.

5 Prepare your home for flood safety. Prepare to turn off any electrical power in your home before you leave. If there is standing water or fallen power lines nearby, then you should turn off your gas and water to avoid electrical shock when the power comes back on. You should also buy a Class A, B, or C fire extinguisher, and ensure that all of your family members know how to use it. You should also buy and install sump pumps with back-up power in case you need it. Here are some other things you should do to prepare your home:^[17]

- Install backflow valves or plugs in your drains, toilets, and any other sewer connections to keep the flood waters out.
- Anchor the fuel tanks in your garage to the ground. If the tanks are torn free, they can be swept downstream and will cause damage to other houses. If they are in your basement, then you don't need to anchor them.
- Download your electrical panel by turning off one breaker at a time. Turn the main one off last, to avoid a large electrical arch.

6 Stock your home with emergency supplies. If you really want to prepare your family for a flood, then you should be prepared with several key items that will increase your chances of safety and survival. Here are some of the items you will need to pack:

- Enough containers to hold three to five days worth of water supply
- A three to five day supply of non-perishable food and a mechanical can opener
- A first aid kit
- A battery-powered radio
- Flashlights
- Sleeping bags and blankets
- Baby wipes for cleaning your hands
- Chlorine or iodine tablets for purifying water
- Soap, toothpaste, and other hygienic supplies
- An emergency kit for your car that includes maps, booster cables, and flares
- Rubber boots and waterproof gloves

Community Q&A

How do I make a plan for preparing ahead of a tornado?



We suggest that you check out our article on [Preparing for a Tornado](#) for some useful ways to get ready ahead of a tornado.

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Tips

- It is a good idea to pick two or three emergency contacts, one who lives outside of your local area code in addition to one who lives within and also someone who can receive text messages.
- If you are having difficulty with any of these steps, there are many resources on the internet to assist in this process. Check out these sites: [Ready.gov](#), operated by the US Department of Homeland Security and [Prepare.org](#), operated by the American Red Cross.
- After Hurricane Katrina cell phones were just about useless to make calls in the affected areas, but they saved many lives and helped reunite families thanks to their text messaging capabilities that survived.
- Be serious about your emergency planning, but be careful not to irrationally frighten children or to become obsessed with disaster yourself. Planning makes you safer, and it should make you and your family feel safer, too.
- Learn how and prepare instructions to turn off all of your gas and electrical supplies in the event of an emergency.
- If your workplace, school, or town hasn't developed an emergency plan, take the initiative to start planning one. Go to meetings of local officials and request assistance, and collaborate with your neighbors and coworkers to help make your whole community safer.
- Purchase and use "Self Powered Radios" and "Self Powered" flashlights. These do **not** use batteries and are *safer* than candles. Some of these models can also charge your cell phone.
- In major disasters one can often call a number outside your area code but not within. In extreme cases, people have had to rely on text messaging when phone lines and towers were decimated in the disaster.
- Besides the resources mentioned above, you might also want to check with your insurance company for ways to make your house safer. Insurers have an interest in minimizing the risk of injury or [damage to your home](#) in the event of a disaster, so they will usually be happy to provide you with information. Many [insurance policies](#) also require certain precautions in order for a loss to be covered.
- Take steps to protect your data. Store important records, documents and information on a password protected flash drive (pack it in your emergency kit) or online backup system so that if you have to evacuate quickly, you will have access to everything you need.

Warnings

- This is not intended to be a complete guide to disaster preparation. You will need to assess the unique set of potential hazards in your area and prepare for them accordingly.

Sources and Citations

1. <http://www.nationalterroralert.com/safewater/>
2. <http://www.nationalterroralert.com/safewater/>
3. <http://www.mayoclinic.org/first-aid/first-aid-kits/basics/art-20056673>

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