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**Discussing a disaster with children**

During emergencies, children often feel afraid, anxious, confused and worried. To help give them a sense of comfort and security, discuss the disaster with them. Below are some tips:

Assume that the children know about the disaster. Children know more than you think. They are often exposed to the events as soon as they are able to watch television and interact with others.

Reassure them. Help your children feel safe by giving them reassurance.

Be realistic—although you try to support and protect them, you cannot prevent all bad things from happening. Tell them that you love them, no matter what happens.

Be available. Be available and “askable.” Let your children know that it’s OK to talk about unpleasant events.

Say how you feel. Sharing your feelings can help children know that others also are upset by the events.

Recognize their fears. Support your children’s concern for people they do not know. Children often are afraid not only for themselves, their family and their friends, but also for people they do not know.

Be aware of other emotions. Look for feelings beyond fear. Let your children express all of their emotions.

Find emotional outlets. Help your children use creative outlets such as art and music to express their feelings.

Help them take action. Children may want to take action. The action can be very simple, such as writing a letter or getting involved with a disaster preparedness organization.

**Make a Family Plan in Case of a Disaster**

You can help protect your family during and immediately after a disaster by making a family disaster plan and by creating a family disaster kit for your household. You and your family need to be able to take care of yourselves without outside help for at least 3 days.

**Make a family plan**  
Families differ considerably. It’s important to create a plan that fits your family’s needs. Regardless, all family members need to know how to respond to severe weather or any disaster that could occur in your area.

When making a family disaster plan, you will need to consider escape routes, family communication, utility shut-off and safety, insurance and vital records, special needs, caring for animals and safety skills.

Escape routes: You need to know escape routes from each room in your house as well as from your neighborhood.

To establish escape routes from your house or apartment, draw up a floor plan and make sure that all family members understand the plan.

Each room should have two exit points. Include all members of the



household when you conduct a practice session.

Be sure to select a site outside the home for everyone to meet after they’ve left the house.

To establish escape routes from the neighborhood, draw a map that shows all the streets and their names so that when authorities provide evacuation instructions, you will know where to go.

Family communication: It’s important to plan how your family members would contact one another if they were separated when disaster strikes. Fill out a contact card for each family member (you may use the samples located in this booklet) and have everyone keep a copy of it in a wallet, purse or backpack for easy reference.

Communication with emergency personnel: If you are injured because of an accident or disaster, you may be unable to speak with emergency medical technicians. In these cases, paramedics and other emergency response personnel often

turn to a victim’s cell phone for clues to his or her identity and emergency contacts.

You can make their job much easier by simply adding an entry in the contacts list of your cell phone: ICE. ICE stands for “In Case of Emergency.” Add an entry, label it ICE, and enter the name and phone number of the person whom the emergency services should call on your behalf.

Adding this entry takes only a few moments, but it can save time for the emergency personnel who can contact your loved ones quickly.

Paramedics know what ICE means, and they look

for it immediately.

Utility shut-off and safety: For some types of disasters, you may need to disconnect utility services to your home. Natural gas leaks are the number one cause of fires after a disaster.

Be sure that responsible family members can turn off the gas, electricity and water supplies. Contact your local utility company for proper shut-off procedures.

Caution: Never turn gas service back on by yourself. Service should be restored only by a trained professional.

Remember It is important to be prepared if a disaster happens.

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