

Bulletin



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Preparing Your Family for an Emergency



While the thought is unsettling to many, we may all find ourselves separated from family and loved-ones should an emergency occur during working hours. Despite our natural inclination to flee the city during an emergency and seek out our family members, it may simply be impossible to do so quickly.

In many situations, it may be necessary or required to shelter-in-place temporarily rather than attempt to venture out. In fact, trying to leave work and return home immediately might actually have the reverse effect intended, exposing you and family members to greater danger. When done en masse, the result could also be complete gridlock, blocking roads and slowing down police and emergency personnel.

Because of this simple reality, it is critical to prepare in advance for a temporary separation from family during an emergency. Prior planning and frank discussions with family can help lessen fear and uncertainty, provide a sense of reassurance, and increase the likelihood of keeping members of your family safe.

Preparing a Family Emergency Plan

- ✓ **Assume separation:** Assume you won't be able to reach family and loved ones immediately should a terrorist event or natural disaster occur, and plan accordingly.
- ✓ **Keep the family informed:** It is critical to discuss the possibility of separation during an emergency with all family members, especially children, so that everyone knows what to expect. Discussion and planning will help lessen anxiety and give everyone a greater sense of control and security.
- ✓ **Plan your communications:** Knowing you could be separated for a period of time in an emergency, plan in advance how to make contact with family and loved ones.
 - ▶ Keep in mind that it may be difficult to make a land line or cellular phone call during a crisis because of overloaded circuits.
 - ▶ Distribute emergency contact numbers for all family members, including work, school, and cell phones.
 - ▶ Have a central point of contact for everyone to call or e-mail – such as an out-of-state relative or friend – who can communicate among separated family members.
 - ▶ Make sure children know how to make long distance phone calls, and provide change or prepaid calling cards to family members in order to make long distance calls.
- ✓ **Plan meeting spots:** Plan locations where family members will meet if it is impossible to return home right away.

- ✓ **Learn about emergency action plans:** Find out what plans are in place at your children’s schools or daycare centers. If they don’t have a plan, volunteer to help them establish one. Be forewarned that many schools may go into “lock-down” and refuse to allow anyone – even parents – to enter the school should a crisis occur.
- ✓ **Update contact numbers:** Be sure your children’s schools and daycare facilities have the most up-to-date contact information for you and other family members.
- ✓ **Work with neighbors:** Talk with neighbors you trust about possible contingencies during an emergency, especially if your children may be home alone after school. Let children know who they can contact in the neighborhood if they need help or are scared.
- ✓ **Plan for special needs:** Be sure that any loved ones who have special needs, especially the elderly or those who take regular medication, are prepared. Make sure they have an extra supply of medication on hand in case they cannot return home, and let schools and daycare and elder care facilities know of special needs and restrictions.

Families, Children, and Coping with Fear and Anxiety*

- ✓ **Talk to your family:** It is critical to communicate openly with all family members about plans for possible emergency situations and how to respond to danger. Many fear that open discussion will create more anxiety, but the opposite is actually true: talking openly about emergencies and how to cope with possible separation will help everyone feel more prepared and help lessen anxiety and uncertainty.
- ✓ **Children need reassurance:** Be sure to talk with your children about their feelings and any fears they may have. Children, especially young ones, may not be able to express their fears or have a realistic view of danger. Ask them about their feelings and answer their questions about world events. Reassure them that they will be protected and that the family has a plan in case of emergency.
- ✓ **Maintain a routine:** Keeping up with daily activities, exercise, and family traditions will help provide a sense of stability for both you and family members in what can otherwise seem like a chaotic time. This is especially important for small children, who derive great comfort from daily routines and rituals.
- ✓ **Make time for family:** In a time of heightened anxiety, it is more important than ever to spend time with loved ones.
- ✓ **Take a break from the news:** Although it is important to stay informed, constant repetition of stories of war and terrorist threats can become very unsettling and create more anxiety. Give yourself a break from the news, and strictly limit your children’s viewing time.
- ✓ **Maintain a positive outlook:** Stay calm and positive. Remember that although it may seem constant, as in the past, times of crisis and danger do pass. Displaying a positive attitude is especially important when you have young children, who take cues from their parents’ outward demeanor. Try not to reinforce their fears with your own.
- ✓ **Don’t be afraid to ask for help:** Remember that resources are available to help you. The Senate, House, and Architect of the Capitol (AOC) have employee assistance programs that can provide counseling and advice for their employees. The House Office of Employee Assistance is also available to Capitol Police.

* Information derived in part from the American Psychological Association articles “Resilience in Time of War” on their web site www.helping.apa.org and with the assistance of the House and Senate employee assistance offices.

Resources for Help

AOC Employee Assistance Program:	H2-360 Ford House Office Building, 202-226-2546
House of Representatives Office of Employee Assistance:	H2-140 Ford House Office Building, 202-225-2400
Senate Employee Assistance Program:	SH-420B Hart Senate Office Building, 202-224-3902

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