



Talking with children before an emergency

It is important to include your children in discussions about emergency plans for your house and family – it will help them know what to do in an emergency to stay safe, give them a greater sense of control and security, as well as assist them in managing their fears – subsequently building their ability to cope in times of adversity. It is also important to include children because they can make a very real and positive difference in an emergency.

We recommend making a plan for your household by downloading an Emergency RediPlan at: redcross.org.au/prepare and following its four easy steps to prepare.

The following pages provide guidance on how to include children in discussions around RediPlan. We recommend selecting a time when you won't be rushed or interrupted. Keep in mind that children will have different levels of understanding and response depending on their age and personality.

First things first: prepare your mind

Psychological and physical preparation are closely linked and both are important. Being psychologically prepared can help all members of a household think clearly and act according to the household emergency plan. Once you have learnt how to prepare your mind for an emergency (see RediPlan p. 4), you can help children learn too.



Anticipate – it's going to get stressful

- Think about how your children usually react to stress.
- Discuss with them what it might be like in an emergency and how they might react.
- Help them to understand that although these reactions are very normal, sometimes they can get in the way of thinking clearly and acting in an emergency.



Identify – feelings and thoughts

- Help children to notice both their physical and emotional reactions to feeling scared.
- Help them to put names to these feelings (“When I get butterflies in my stomach that can sometimes mean I am feeling scared.”)
- Show them how to identify unhelpful thoughts they might be having that are adding to their fears (“Something bad is going to happen to us”).
- Remind children that strong physical and emotional reactions to emergencies are normal, but there are ways to manage them.



Manage – feelings and thoughts

- Children can learn two simple techniques to help them feel more in control.
 - Teach children to slow down their breathing to help calm their anxiety. (“Imagine you’re breathing in your favourite colour”). When breathing out slowly (“Imagine you are breathing out your least favourite colour.”)
 - Teach children to replace scary thoughts with more helpful ones. (“This might be scary but we have made a plan for this to help keep us safe.”)

RediPlan has been designed to provide an easy to follow set of actions to help you plan for emergencies, grouped into four simple steps.

STEP 1: GET IN THE KNOW

- Tell children an emergency is something unusual that happens which could harm people, or cause damage to things like houses and cars.
- Give examples of emergencies that could happen in your community and the warning signs for each.
- Talk about the effects of an emergency that children can relate to, such as loss of electricity, water, and telephone service; flooded roads and uprooted trees.
- Be mindful that children may have questions about scary things they have heard about or seen on television, such as terrorist attacks, bush fires and cyclones. It is important to be informed on a subject before answering these questions. Your statements will influence your child's views and level of concern.
- Explain that everyone is better able to take care of themselves in emergencies when they know what to do, and have practised in advance.



STEP 2: GET CONNECTED

- Tell children that in an emergency there are many people who can help: emergency services workers, family, friends, teachers and neighbours. Talk about how they might help. Educate them on stranger danger and safe practices when dealing with adults.
- Agree on a location that everyone can meet at should you not be able to get home or if network services are down. Talk about how you might get there in different situations or who you might ask to come get them if you are not available.
- Teach children how and when to call for help, including 000 for police, fire, or ambulance as well as work and mobile numbers of household members and out of town contacts. Post emergency numbers by all telephones at home. Help children write down their emergency numbers on an Emergency contact card for when they are not at home (download at www.redcross.org.au/prepare).



STEP 3: GET ORGANISED

- As a family, write down your emergency plans. Select a suitable activity for each child that gives them a feeling of having something to do and note it in the plan.
- Practise the plan as a household until everyone knows it really well, and then follow up annually. Keep the plan in an easy to access place for all family members.
- Quiz children every 6 months or when an 'alert' has been announced, such as a cyclone warning or fire ban day, so they will remember where to meet, what telephone numbers to call, and safety rules.



STEP 4: GET PACKING

- Get children to help with packing your household Emergency kit including survival items (e.g. food, water, blankets) and recovery items (e.g. precious objects such as teddy bears or photos).
- Ask them to think about what is important to them and what they would want to take with them if they had to leave the home. Suggest that they practise packing these into a small backpack/pillowcase.



Further information

- Please share the steps you have taken to prepare your household with others in your community and encourage your children to do the same.
- For further information on preparing a household emergency plan, visit www.redcross.org.au/prepare



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