# [How to Make a Disaster Plan for Your Family](http://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Disaster-Plan-for-Your-Family)

 **Determine what disasters your area is susceptible to**. 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](http://www.wikihow.com/Join-the-Civil-Air-Patrol) office, [Red Cross](http://www.wikihow.com/Support-the-American-Red-Cross-Via-Instant-Messaging) chapter, or the National Weather Service to get an idea of what emergencies you should prepare for.

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**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](http://www.wikihow.com/Read-a-Map) 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 (you can find information on many disaster situations right here on wikiHow) 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.

**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.

**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.

**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.

**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](http://www.wikihow.com/Recharge-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.](http://www.wikihow.com/Use-a-Fire-Extinguisher) Everyone should also know how to escape the house in the event of a fire.
* If you live in an area prone to [earthquakes](http://www.wikihow.com/React-During-an-Earthquake), 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.

**Teach your family basic life-saving techniques**. Everyone who can learn [CPR](http://www.wikihow.com/Administer-Adult-CPR-%28Cardiopulmonary-Resuscitation%29) and [first aid](http://www.wikihow.com/Create-a-Home-First-Aid-Kit) 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](http://www.wikihow.com/Call-911) 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.

[**Assemble a disaster kit**](http://www.wikihow.com/Pack-an-Emergency-Kit-for-the-House). Be prepared for emergencies with at least a three-day supply of non-perishable food and potable [water](http://www.wikihow.com/Purify-Water), prescription [medications](http://www.wikihow.com/Remember-to-Take-Medication), first aid supplies, 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. See the related wikiHow for more details on building a disaster kit. An inexpensive "pay-as-you-go" cell phone is a good addition to the kit.

**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.

**Have contingency plans**. In the event your emergency site is unavailable or other things change, it's a good idea to have an alternate already identified.

# Family Action Plan—Natural Disasters

In Emergencies, Plan Ahead to Be Prepared   
  
Just as surely as accidents happen, so do natural disasters. And while it’s possible you and your family may never actually be faced with one, it’s advisable to have a family action plan in the event you do. Depending on where you live, you may need to respond quickly when a hurricane, earthquake, tsunami, tornado, fire, flood, blizzard or extreme weather event occurs. The first step is gathering everyone in your household to create a plan together.

Each family member needs to know exactly what to do since emergencies can strike with little or no warning. You should also discuss contingencies—what you would do if family members are not at home when a warning is issued.

While every emergency is different, here’s what to incorporate in any plan you make:

✔ **Escape routes** from your house. You need to determine two ways to get out of the house in an emergency, particularly from kids’ bedrooms. Make drawings that kids can understand and post them at eye level in their rooms. Make sure they understand what to do.

✔ **Plan an evacuation route**. Keep one family vehicle fully fueled to account for distance travel and outages at gas stations. Use one vehicle to minimize delays and congestion on roads. Have a supply of non-perishable food and water ready. Follow any instructions given by local authorities. Leave early enough to avoid being trapped. Take recommended routes—shortcuts may be blocked. Be alert for road hazards like flooding or downed power lines.

✔ **Create contact cards**. Make cards for each family member with names, phone and mobile numbers, out-of-area relatives’ or friends’ contact information and designated meeting places. Make sure every family member keeps a card in a wallet, purse or backpack that they will have with them.

✔ **Know how to shut off your utilities**. In some circumstances, you may need to shut off your gas, water and electricity before evacuating.

✔ **Keep copies of important documents** in a waterproof, fire-resistant box. This includes insurance policies, an inventory of valuable possessions (including photographs) and other crucial paperwork. Store the originals in a safety deposit box away from your home.

✔ **Prepare for those with special needs**. This is important not only for elderly or disabled family members but anyone who requires medication or medical assistance. Build a support network with neighbors, friends and coworkers who could help you if necessary.

✔ **Take care of your pets**. Find out in advance what area shelters, hotels and other lodging sites allow for animals. Prepare a pet survival kit with food, medication, toys, leashes and any other pet necessities.

✔ **Learn First Aid, CPR** and fire extinguisher use. The life of a family member may depend on it.

✔ **Use resources on the web**. There are many local, state and national emergency preparedness websites that can provide detailed plans and information. Search online for “family emergency planning” and go to sites like fema.gov, or your state’s emergency information site. Florida’s site, Floridadisaster.org, gives useful guidance on family action plans and other emergency considerations.

# Before the natural disaster: Planning and preparing tips for older adults

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March 2010; Reviewed by Kathleen Olson, Extension Educator — Family Relations

Planning and preparing for a natural disaster such as a flood is likely something most older adults have been faced with before. They can certainly call upon their resilience, their experience and wisdom to help them through yet another flood. However, the aging process can make many older adults particularly vulnerable during a disaster especially if they have one or more chronic illnesses, functional limitations or dementia. Family members may need to be involved in helping their older family members to develop a plan and have the necessary items on hand should a disaster strike.

In addition to a basic emergency “kit,” there are additional preparation concerns for older adults. They need to make sure the kit includes medications, medical devices, oxygen, batteries for hearing aids, and lists of medications, doctors, pharmacies complete with phone numbers. The kit should also contain any special instructions for care or comfort should the older person not be able to provide that information themselves. It is also advisable to wear medical alert tags to assist emergency personnel.

If there are special health issues such as dialysis or other life sustaining treatment needed, older adults or family members will need to identify alternative facilities should they be needed. Some communities may have special needs shelters for those who need medical assistance and have no other place to go. They may require advance registration. Identify these and have information on how to contact them readily available.

All families should make a communication plan. Families should discuss how they will get in contact with each other and where they will meet should they become separated.

Create a plan to evacuate. Where will older adults go and how will they get there? Learning the locations of emergency shelters and directions is important. It may be hard for older adults to leave their homes and their possessions and go to a strange place. Ignoring an evacuation order may be dangerous. It may be better to evacuate while there is still time to accommodate mobility issues and getting needed equipment with the person rather than face an emergency evacuation which could be traumatic and chaotic. If there are pets in the home, alternate shelter may need to be arranged. Shelters do not normally take in pets unless they are service animals. If a service animal is in use, be sure to include food for the animal as part of an evacuation bag.

If an older family member is in a care facility in the disaster area, ask the facility about their disaster plans. Ask what emergency plans are in place? How does the facility define an emergency? How will families be notified if a patient is evacuated? Where will patients be taken?

With a disaster such as a flood, there is typically advance warning and days to prepare. There is also plenty of time to worry. Older adults may become upset and overly focused on the news reports surrounding the impending disaster. It is helpful for them to maintain their normal routines, meal patterns and sleeping habits as much as possible. Minimizing talk about the disaster or the watching of 24 hour new reports can be helpful. Finding activities to pass the time or other diversions can also be beneficial. Older adults may also want to provide assistance to others and finding ways for them to contribute to the efforts may ease some of the stress and helpless feelings.

Experiencing a natural disaster can be a traumatic event. Making plans and preparing for the worst can help to alleviate some of the stress involved and insure the health and safety of the older adult involved.