



## Health and Safety Notes California Childcare Health Program

# Emergency/Disaster Preparedness for the Child Care Setting



Please take a few minutes to think about how you would answer the following 3 questions:

1. Does your child care setting have emergency/disaster plans?
2. Are emergency/disaster drills practiced regularly at your child care setting?
3. As a child care provider, do you know your role in an emergency/disaster?

Whether you answered yes to all 3 questions or answered no to one or more, you are congratulated for taking the time to review some of the steps that should be taken for your child care setting to be fully prepared for an emergency/disaster.

Emergencies/disasters are typically unplanned and shocking. Therefore, being properly prepared ahead of time can guide you to respond appropriately and aid you to stay calm in an emergency/disaster. This can help save both time and lives. Remember, you are the one responsible for the safety of yourself and of the children in your care.

### What is an emergency and a disaster?

Something that is important to understand is the difference between an emergency, such as an asthma attack, and a disaster, such as an earthquake. Even though this writing purposely uses emergency and disaster as if they are the same, according to Random House Webster's Dictionary (1998), there is a definite difference between an emergency and a disaster. An emergency is "a sudden, urgent, usually unexpected occurrence requiring immediate action". A disaster is "a calamitous (great misfortune) event, especially one occurring suddenly and causing great damage". Both emergencies and disasters can begin suddenly, but disasters usually result in a larger impact to the community when compared to emergencies.

### Why have emergency/disaster plans?

Having a plan can help you be more prepared before an emergency/disaster. Your child care setting must have written plans that are updated, practiced, and/or trained for routinely. The more overall experience you have with your plans, the more effectively you will respond in an emergency/disaster. The Head

Start Disaster Preparedness Workbook says that disaster plans "define the policies, procedures, and resources put in place by your program to prepare for, respond to and recover from any type of disaster that may occur". You can also use the above definition to define an emergency plan by putting the word emergency in place of disaster.

### Which emergency/disaster plans are needed?

The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that your child care setting has emergency/disaster plans available in writing for the following:

- Handling urgent medical care or threatening incidents;
- Emergency evacuations;
- Medical emergencies;
- Children with seizures;
- Children with asthma;
- Children with food allergies.

### What emergency/disaster training is needed?

Once the emergency/disaster plans are in place, you will need to be well trained in order to carry out the emergency/disaster plans when the time is necessary. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that you receive training for the following:

- Handling urgent medical care or threatening incidents;
- First aid;
- CPR;
- Emergency evacuations;
- Handling seizures;
- Handling asthma;
- Handling food allergies.

### What emergency/disaster drills are needed?

In preparation for an emergency/disaster, the regular practice of emergency/disaster drills is important for both the adults and the children in your care. Moreover, the Title 22 Regulations for licensed child care programs require that all programs, including centers and family child care homes,

have a disaster plan in writing and perform and document a disaster drill at least every six months. A copy of the form (called Form 610 for child care centers and Form 610A for family child care homes) can be obtained by calling your local CCL office or can be downloaded from the CCL web site at [http://ccl.dss.cahwnet.gov/LicensingF\\_1774.htm](http://ccl.dss.cahwnet.gov/LicensingF_1774.htm).

Evacuation drills help assist you, other staff, and the children with knowing what to do in an actual emergency/disaster. As earthquakes and fires are a high risk in California, earthquake and fire drills should definitely be practiced. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that earthquake drills are practiced at least every 6 months. Children and staff should practice how to duck, cover, and hold. The recommendation for fire drills is that children learn how to crawl on the floor under smoke and how to stop, drop, and roll. Your child care setting should keep the date and time of the evacuation drills on record. A good practice to have during the evacuation drills is to take roll of the children to make sure they have all safely evacuated.

### **What if an emergency/disaster happens?**

Take a moment to think about yourself working at your child care setting. Imagine that a serious earthquake happens while you are working. The damage from the earthquake is so bad that you are left without running water and electricity in your child care setting. The structure you are in has been partly destroyed and is no longer safe. Everyone must evacuate. Some children and staff have been injured and need assistance right away. Ask yourself the following questions. What do you need to do at this moment and what did you need to do to be prepared? Is your child care setting prepared for this situation or for any emergency/disaster? Continue reading to find out what else you need to be ready.

### **What is your role in an emergency/disaster?**

Before an emergency/disaster occurs, you need to know what your role will be in the event of an emergency/disaster. The staff at your child care setting should write down, discuss, and practice the positions that each person will take in an emergency/disaster. Some examples of role responsibilities include first aid, documentation, and child care. To limit confusion, usually there is only one person that is chosen to be in charge of everyone. Another person should be picked to take over for the leader position if the person in charge is unavailable at the time.

### **Communicating with families**

Communication with the families of the children in

your care should be a high priority before, during, and after an emergency/disaster. Before an emergency/disaster takes place, families should be made aware of your emergency/disaster plans. Of most importance is making sure the families know how to contact you and that you know how to contact the families in case of an emergency/disaster.

An emergency card should be completed and kept on file at your child care setting for each child. Make sure the information on the emergency cards is updated regularly, at least every three months, and as needed so that the information will be accurate. The families should be told where you would go in the event of an evacuation, so they will know how to find their children. Have the families tell you who is allowed to pick up their children, and do not send children home with unauthorized people. Taking these steps ahead of time can help you maintain contact with families during an emergency/disaster. Once the emergency/disaster is over, update your emergency plan to bring things back to normal again in the child care setting.

### **What to remember in an emergency/disaster**

When an emergency/disaster occurs, people will sometimes go into shock and panic. Panicking often results in difficulty thinking, which can lead to a response that is unsuccessful at ensuring safety quickly. Knowing what to do before a disaster/emergency happens can help prevent this dangerous situation. Here are a few important tips to remember.

- STAY CALM
- Be prepared
- Supervise the children; make sure the children are safe
- Follow your written plan
- Communicate your plan to parents and staff
- Assign specific roles to staff
- Listen to the person in charge
- Know when to get help
- Keep the families involved

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### **References and Resources**

*Caring for our Children, National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Out-of-Home Child Care* (2nd ed.). Elk Grove Village, IL: American Academy of Pediatrics.

*Head Start Disaster Preparedness Workbook*. Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Center for Public Health and Disasters.