

MAKE AN EMERGENCY PLAN FOR YOUR FAMILY

When disasters occur, you may have only moments to react and will likely be under considerable stress. The local authorities may be unable to tell you what is happening or what you should do. Having an emergency plan will help you to remain calm and take the appropriate steps to safeguard your family in the face of uncertainty.

Getting Started

There are several excellent planning resources on the Internet. Members in the United States should visit FEMA's "Ready.gov" website (www.ready.gov/make-a-plan) for helpful tips and resources. Members in Canada will find useful information on Public Safety Canada's website (www.getprepared.gc.ca). Also, most state, local, and provincial governments provide information on how to prepare for local hazards. Check your local government's website or contact your neighborhood fire department or Red Cross chapter for information.

The Basics

Sit down together with your family and discuss what you would do in different emergency situations. Include your entire family, including school-aged children. Put your plan in writing (even a simple checklist would be a good start) and make sure that everyone has a copy of it.

As you develop your plan, be sure to consider the hazards that will likely affect your community. There may be, for example, a history of flooding or tornadoes in your area. You should focus on these hazards, while keeping in mind that other types of disasters could occur.

If you live alone, identify family or friends who will be concerned about you if an emergency hits your area. Carry their mobile phone numbers and e-mail addresses in your wallet so you can let them know as soon as possible where you are and if you are safe or need help.

Post your plan and emergency telephone numbers in prominent places around your home, such as the refrigerator, and review and update your plan on a regular basis. You may also want to create wallet cards, so that you can carry critical information with you wherever you go.

Don't forget to maintain at least a two-week supply of food and water, as well as other critical items, such as sanitation items, prescription medication, emergency cash, and infant supplies.

Show your family members how and when to turn off the water, gas, and electricity, and make sure that your children know how to use fire extinguishers and call 911.

Preparing for Evacuations

It is important to think about where you will go if have to evacuate. Plan for different scenarios in which you might be forced to leave at a moment's notice.

For example, identify a safe meeting place outside of the home if you have to evacuate as the result of a fire or explosion. Make sure that your family knows how to get out of the house and where they should meet. If a member of the family is missing, report it to the emergency personnel immediately, but also inform them of all the possible escape routes your family member might use. There have been instances in which first responders have risked their lives only to later discover that a person had already left the building from an alternative exit.

You should be ready for emergencies in which you have to evacuate far out of your area. But be sure to listen to the radio or TV for instructions from the local authorities. In some instances, it may be safer to stay where you are (also known as “sheltering in place”) until the authorities can get the situation under control.

Be familiar with your community’s official evacuation routes and be prepared to take alternative routes if the main roads are damaged or inaccessible. Many local governments maintain helpful evacuation instructions and maps on their websites.

Keep evacuation packs ready for you and your family and be sure to keep at least half a tank of gas in your car at all times. It may be difficult, if not impossible, to find gasoline in the middle of an emergency.

Plan for Instances in which Your Family Is Separated by Disaster

You may be miles apart from your family when disaster strikes. Telephone lines and the Internet may be down, making it impossible to reach them. Your neighborhood may be inaccessible or too dangerous to enter.

Before there is a disaster, identify safe sites where your family can meet in the event that you can’t communicate with them or return home. You may, for example, decide to meet at parking lot of the local library or the home of a relative or friend.

Even when local telephone lines are congested, it may still be possible to make a long-distance call. Identify out of town contacts (i.e., a friends or relatives) who can relay information to and from your family when you can’t reach your family through other means. Text messaging is another excellent option for emergency communications. You may also want to consider the possibility of becoming licensed as a ham radio operator.

Other Important Considerations

Caring for Holy Objects:

If you have a Goshintai, please prepare a Holy Objects evacuation kit, and identify at least 2 or 3 safe sites, in addition to the center, where you can go if you have to evacuate. Arrangements should also be made for the proper care and handling of ancestor tablets. Of course, it is always best to wear your Omitama as much as you can; pack a travel Omitama care kit in your emergency pack along with an extra set of clothes that includes an item with an Omitama pocket sewn in.

Contact your center director for more detailed guidance on the care and handling of Holy Objects during emergencies.

School-aged Children:

Think about what you will do if disaster strikes while your children are in school. Although you may be tempted to pull them out of class, it may be better for them to remain in the school until the emergency subsides. Be familiar with your school's emergency plan and its pickup procedures to make sure that children return to the correct parents. Identify a trusted relative or friend who can look after your children if you can't reach the school right away. Place emergency contact and medical information in your child's backpack.

Relatives with Special Needs:

Consider the special needs of family members who may be elderly, sick, or disabled. Make sure that they have adequate supplies, including food, water, and prescription medication, and designate a caregiver who can stay with them in case you're not available.

Remember that those with special needs may not be able to speak for themselves when first responders arrive. Prepare a free "Vial of Life" kit (www.vialoflife.com) so that firefighters, paramedics and medical practitioners can quickly provide appropriate care to your loved ones.

On Vacation/Traveling on Business:

Give some thought as to how you will communicate with and locate your family members if you are out of town while on vacation or traveling on business.

Pets:

Think about how you will care for your pets in an emergency. Many shelters will not allow pets unless the pet is a service animal. If you are unable to return home during an emergency, you may need to board your pet or leave it with a trusted friend or relative. Contact your local emergency management office or animal shelter for advice.

Neighborhood Support Network:

Reach out to your neighbors to come up with ideas for how you can support each other when disaster strikes. Form a neighborhood committee and identify people who have special skills, as well as those who may need extra help.

The Importance of Regular Practice

Cody Lundin, author of *When All Hell Breaks Loose: Stuff You Need to Survive When Disaster Strikes*, noted:

“Surviving a life-threatening scenario is largely psychological on the part of the survivors. Get this fact into your head now that living through a survival scenario is 90 percent psychology, and 10 percent methodology and gear.”

It is important to conduct regular drills so that your family is practically and *psychologically prepared* for disasters. All emergency first responders know this and uphold the importance of repetitive practice to maintain their effectiveness in disasters.

Sit down with your family to review and update your plan at least once every six months. Talk about different scenarios and make sure that everyone knows the roles they will play during an emergency. Conduct regular fire drills and verify that everyone knows what to do. You may also want to conduct your own “ten-minute evacuation challenge” (for details, see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TLtrntXifkY>).

While it may not be possible to prepare our families for every scenario, it is clear that emergency planning can save lives. As the Baptism by Fire increases in intensity, let us do our best to follow the example of our Holy Masters and “never forget the possibility of disaster even when times are calm.”