

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS



Get Ready! Every child care program should have a plan for what to do if faced with a disaster or emergency. Being prepared can mean the difference between catastrophe and manageable disruption. Knowing how to react and respond appropriately reduces the risk of injury and trauma, lessens fears and anxiety, and aids in recovery and reopening of facilities. The lives of children and staff may depend on the plan you have made and put in place.

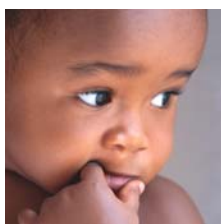
After a disaster child care providers play a crucial role. Sarasota County government recognizes the importance of having centers up and running to support children and families by offering a safe haven and a location to distribute resources in the midst of often chaotic situations.

Some of the following information was presented by Dr. Ilene Berson at the Disaster Preparedness workshop on June 9 at Twin Lakes. Other sources are listed at the end of this handout so you can access the entire documents if you are interested. Sample forms and a sheet specifically for family child care providers are included to

give you an idea of elements to consider as you develop your own plan.

While every emergency plan stresses the need to have accurate attendance sheets and contact information for children Dr. Berson added that children's emergency information should include photos in case children are separated from their parents, as was the case in Hurricane Katrina. Loading important documents onto a USB flash drive (and having a laptop computer with extra batteries) is another strategy she mentioned that could make a real difference in an emergency.

Disaster preparedness plans should include a review of possible natural or man-made disasters, steps that can be taken to prepare in advance, and then a detailed action plan outlining what to do should disaster strike. Plans should be tailored to the unique situation of each facility, directors should train staff on their responsibilities, share the plan with parents, and make sure children practice fire drills and evacuation procedures. It takes time, but it's worth the effort.



- **Possible emergency situations**

- Hurricane
- Fire
- Medical events
- Other (terrorists' acts, hazardous material)

- **Plan ahead**

- Post emergency numbers and evacuation plan in every classroom
- Conduct regular fire/evacuation drills
- Prepare children through appropriate, non-threatening activities
- Train staff on emergency procedures, train new staff as part of orientation
- Maintain accurate sign in/out attendance
- Check on maintaining "continuity of operations" business insurance to provide cash flow if you have to close

- **Emergency response plan**

- Develop detailed plan including procedures for closure/relocation and share with parents and staff
- Identify "safe places" within your facility to take children
- Identify relocation site and emergency transportation
- Determine how to communicate with parents, local authorities, and DCF
- Have parents complete emergency cards with photos to attach to children in an evacuation
- Plan for how to accommodate children with special needs
- Create an organizational chart with staff name, phone number, position
- Designate each person's role and responsibility in an emergency, such as:

- ✓ Who will give first aid?
- ✓ Who will take attendance sheets?
- ✓ Who will be responsible for bringing information cards on each child?



• **Facility evacuation tool kit**

- Laptop computer with extra batteries and flash drive with necessary information loaded in, or hard copies of necessary information:
 - ✓ employee contact information, contact numbers for licensing, emergency response, social services, insurance, credit card accounts
- Detailed portable documentation with release information on each child
- Accurate attendance sheets for children and staff
- Emergency information cards to attach to each child with photos
- First aid kit
- Personal hygiene items (handwashing solution, soap, paper towels)
- Diapers, baby food/formula, extra clothes
- Bottled water
- Cell phone
- Radios and extra batteries
- Flashlight, lanterns with extra batteries
- Car charger for laptop and cell phone
- Disaster plan
- Maps, driving directions to relocation site
- Transportation procedure, vehicles with full gas tanks
- *Always start and end with head count*



• **Important locations**

- Electricity shut off and how to operate
- Gas shut off and how to operate
- Water shut off and how to operate
- Air vent shut off and how to stop circulation
- Emergency kits



• **After a disaster and before reopening**

- Florida Administrative Code requires that child care providers notify licensing of their status and the condition of their site following any type of disaster. In the event of a major disaster, an inspection will likely be required before reopening to ensure the safe condition of the facility

The aftermath of traumatic and frightening events can cause both adults and children to become depressed and fearful. At these times it is especially important for children to get the extra attention and support they need to cope with these feelings. Changes in children's behavior such as more crying, clinginess, temper tantrums, hitting, problems sleeping, exhibiting regressive behaviors, and developing new fears are signs that children need help managing their feelings. Difficult feelings equal difficult behavior.

Actions that teachers can take include holding children or keeping them close, letting them know they will be taken care of, limiting TV viewing of the situation, doing familiar things in a predictable routine, allowing children to identify and express their feelings, and helping them express anger in ways that won't hurt others - through words, play, or drawing. Talking about things that are going well may also help children (and adults) feel better.

For more information access these resources online:

Florida's Emergency Response website and template to create a family disaster plan, www.floridadisaster.org
 National Association for Regulatory Administration (NARA) PowerPoint, Emergency Preparedness, Judy Collins and Jim Loving.
<http://www.nara.affiniscape.com/associations/4734/files/Emergencypreparedness.ppt>

North Carolina Child Care Health & Safety Resource Center, Spring 2006, www.healthychildcarenc.org

National Association of Child Care Resource & Referral Agencies, www.naccrra.org

Maine Planning Guide for Emergency Response (YIKES) www.maine.gov/dhhs/occhs/yikesplanning.pdf

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