

Does Your Family Have An Emergency Plan?

(StatePoint) Part of a parent's job is to prepare children for the uncertainties of life. And while you may not be able to bubble-wrap your child or outfit your teen with a tracking device, there are steps you can take to prepare your family for emergencies, such as natural disasters, terrorist threats or outbreaks of violence.

To stay safe during an emergency, all families should put a plan in place ahead-of-time to ensure the safety of each family member, according to experts at the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). Children often feel safer when they know their parents have a plan to protect them.

"Families need to be adequately prepared to meet their children's physical, medical and psychological needs," says Deborah Mulligan, MD, FAAP, chair of the AAP Council on Communications and Media. "Planning ahead increases the likelihood of securing the safety of your family, and provides peace of mind for parents and children alike."

Dr. Mulligan says parents should involve their children in disaster planning. The AAP offers instructions for a Family Readiness Kit to help families prepare for hurricanes and other events. These instructions, along with information about preparing for different emergencies, are available at www.aap.org/disasters.

The kit has a detailed list of items to keep on hand in your home and in your car, such as food and water, pet supplies, warm clothing, rain gear, blankets and toiletries. A battery-powered radio, extra batteries, flashlights, credit cards, cash and a first-aid kit are on the list, along with many other essential items. Medicines, baby supplies and copies of individual medical histories should be included as well.

Families should also establish "rally points," places for



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Talking can help kids deal with traumatic events.

family members to regroup if they are separated during a disaster or evacuation. Designate one rally point for each location where family members spend significant time: school, work and the neighborhood.

Part of any disaster preparedness plan is anticipating the emotional toll an emergency can have on children, so parents also need to talk with their children to help them put things in perspective. And kids need to know how their school is prepared to help them in various kinds of emergencies.

"Adults need to help children cope with fear, loss and insecurities before and after an event," says David Schonfeld, MD, FAAP, a member of the AAP Disaster Preparedness Advisory Council.

For more information on the physical preparation needed for disasters, as well as how to support children's mental health during and after a crisis, visit www.aap.org/disasters.