

# Are You Prepared For **DISASTERS?**



## Family Readiness Kit

American Academy of Pediatrics

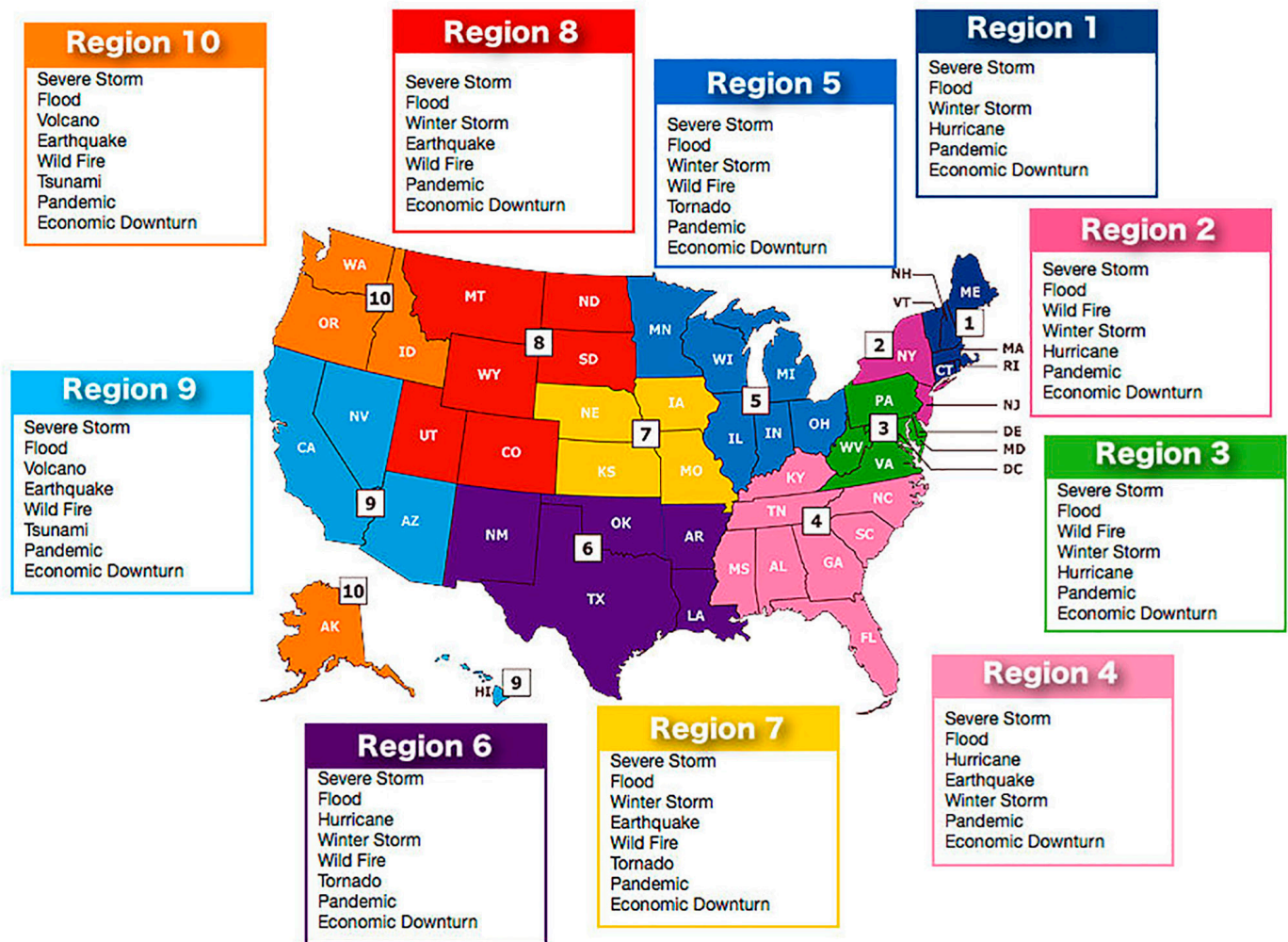


# Caring For Your Family

As a parent, guardian and family member, you want to make sure that your loved ones are healthy, safe, and secure. Disaster planning may feel overwhelming. However, it is easier than you think. Taking a few simple steps now can help protect your family, assure that your children feel safe, and make it easier to recover after a disaster.

We are all aware of disasters. Natural and man-made disasters can affect anyone. Different types of disasters may require different knowledge and skills. Although each family needs to prepare in its own way, it is important that all families are provided with information that will help them handle a disaster.

To learn about disasters in each state, visit [www.fema.gov/disasters](http://www.fema.gov/disasters) or see the US Disaster Risk Map below.



## Understanding Disasters

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Based on where you live, you may be at high risk for disasters:

- Forest Fires
- Floods
- Tornadoes
- Severe Weather
- Winter Weather
- Hurricanes
- Earthquakes

Climate change and extreme weather as well as influenza pandemics affect our children. Human-caused disasters, such as [hazardous material spills](#), can also affect you and your community. Basic preparation will help you in any type of disaster. Prepare now. Tomorrow may be the day you need it.

## Community Violence

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Sadly, sudden acts of violence do occur, such as a shooting in a large crowd. Some of the same plans to keep your family safe can be used for these events.

- [American Red Cross Terrorism – Preparing for the Unexpected.](#)
- [If You See Something, Say Something.](#)

## The Family Readiness Kit and How to Use It

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This kit includes information from preparedness experts, parents, and child care providers.

Recent studies and surveys show that:

- 39% of parents say their child's Head Start/child care center or preschool had experienced an emergency in the past two years.<sup>1</sup>
- Only modest improvement had been made in household preparedness (23% in 2003 to 35% in 2015);<sup>2</sup>
- A lack of confidence remains in local governments to respond to disasters; and
- Families remain unfamiliar with school or child care disaster plans.<sup>2</sup>

This kit can help families get disaster-ready. This kit includes general guidelines for readiness that can be used in most situations. For more detailed information about all types of disasters, see the Resources section.

Remember, ask all family members to help make the disaster plan. Everyone should know what to do if family members are not together. Plan to do your part and work together as a team. A disaster can cause a lot of stress and confusion. Keep the family readiness plan simple so everyone can remember the important details. Once a plan is finished, practice your Family Disaster Plan every six months so that everyone will remember what to do when in an emergency.

Fear and anxiety can be reduced when there is a disaster plan. A disaster plan will help everyone know how to respond. Your child's doctor also can help. During your next visit, ask your child's doctor how to best prepare for disasters.

# Family Readiness

Families come in all sizes. They include children, grandparents, pets and anyone else who may live in the same house. A disaster plan should include all the needs of each family member. True family readiness is achieved when a family has prepared and planned together.

It takes time to put together a disaster plan. Kids can be involved in each step with age appropriate activities. Include children in family preparedness discussions and decisions.

Many families say getting disaster-ready was a lot easier than they thought. Follow these 4 simple steps to get disaster-ready:

1. Build a Kit
2. Make a Plan
3. Be Informed
4. Get Involved



**1 Build a Kit . . .** Keep a supply kit of things you may need in case of an emergency. For example, flashlights and extra batteries if you do not have power or bottled water if you are stuck in your home and may not have power or water. Also keep a supply kit in your car in case your car breaks down.

Check your kits at least once every 6 months. Items may need to be replaced or updated. For example,

- Replace expired food.
- Replace items children may outgrow such as diapers and clothing.
- Update personal and medical records. If you have copies of important documents at home, make sure to give a copy to a trusted person in another region, and save any details that you can in your phone or in a web-based system (or the Cloud).

Visit online resources such as [www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov), [www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org), and [www.healthychildren.org](http://www.healthychildren.org) for more information about what to include in a supply kit.

## Special Needs

If you have a child with special health care needs, you may want to make him or her a “go bag.” It may be a bag your child takes to school each day. You can keep the special bag with your family kit, but it should be easy to carry. Fill in the [AAP Emergency Information Form for Children with Special Needs](#) and save a copy on your phone. See the [AAP children and youth with special needs](#) web page for more information.

## Pets

Pets are part of the family too. Find tips for making a disaster plan for your pets [here](#).





**Make a Plan . . .** The plan must include communication, transportation and reunification. You should consider steps to take if you have to leave your home quickly or if you need to shelter for an extended time.

### Communications Plan

- Talk with your kids! Talk about how to prepare for disasters that could happen in your area. Teach them what the different danger or warning signals sound like (ex: fire alarm, tornado siren). Show them where you keep a list of contacts, such as family members, emergency contacts, doctors' and veterinary offices, and pharmacy.
- When old enough, teach your children their parents' names, phone numbers and addresses.
- Consider using the [Backpack Emergency card](#) or the [Child ID card](#). Place a copy of this card in your child's kit or backpack. (Your state may have a process to obtain a child id card.)
- Teach your child about 9-1-1 and when to call this number.
- Choose an out of state family "check-in" member and make sure everyone in the family knows how to contact them.
- If you fear you may become separated from your child, then write your phone number on his/her forearm with permanent marker (or provide them with an emergency bracelet). Do this even if your child knows your phone number. When kids are stressed or hurt they may not be able to recall a phone number.
- Decide on local and out-of-state meeting places if you become separated from your family.
- During a disaster, cell communications may not work. Make sure all family members know how to text or make a plan to inform members through one social media platform.

### Transportation Plan

- Let child care or school staff know who can pick your child up if you are not able to do so. Let your kids know about this back-up plan.
- Know your evacuation routes as well as alternate routes. If possible, find a friend's or relative's place that is far away (hundreds of miles) where you and your family could stay. Print directions to this location and keep these in your car and in your disaster kit.
- Identify the shelters in your area. Find out which shelters can suit your needs, such as medical, family, or pets. Use the [Red Cross Shelter App](#) to find a shelter near you.

### Reunification Plan

- Create a [Child ID card](#) or [Backpack Emergency card](#).
- Create a Family "password" or phrase to prevent your children from going with a stranger.
- Identify a family meeting place outside the home (ex: neighbor's house).
- Take and store photographs on your phone of all forms of identification cards for your family. Consider having a hard copy on you at all times, in case you misplace your phone.
- Keep pets collared and/or chipped. Pets tend to get scared during times of chaos and will act out of character and potentially run away.





**3 Be Informed . . .** As part of your plans, consider working with others to create networks of neighbors, relatives, friends, and co-workers who will help each other in an emergency.

- Talk with your neighbors. Learn who has special skills such as doctors, nurses, and fire fighters. Find out who has special needs and may need extra help such as elderly or disabled persons.
- Buy a battery-operated or weather radio, such as a [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration](#) (NOAA) radio, for your home.
- Talk with your kids about the difference between a weather watch and warning so they understand the different messages the radio will provide
- Download the [Red Cross Emergency App](#) to your phone. For older kids who have their own phones, download it to their phones also. The App is free and will send text alerts when there is a watch or warning for your area. You also can use it to see what emergency shelters have been set up after a disaster.
- Show your kids where the smoke alarms and carbon monoxide alarms are located in your home. Review with them what they need to do for each alarm if they go off.
- Learn about environmental risks in your area and plan for each risk. Risks may include [tornados](#), [floods](#), [hurricanes](#) or [earthquakes](#).
- Use the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [Ready Wrigley Activity Books](#) to help prepare your kids for disasters.
- Check with your child's school or child care program to find out what plans are in place to help kids stay safe.

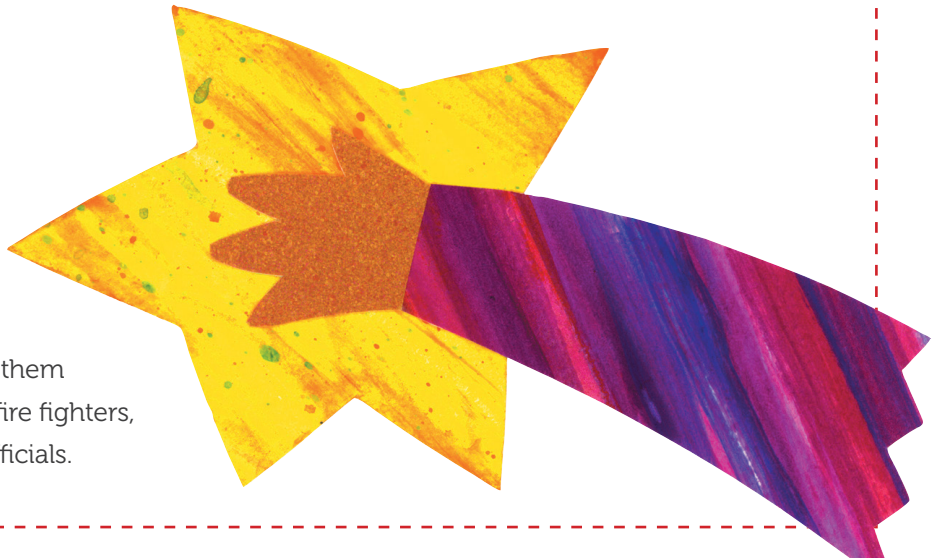


**4 Get Involved . . .** Have your kids help you or watch when you test the smoke alarms in your home. If you can, do this each month. If you can't check each month, check at least every 6 months when reviewing your kit. This gives your kids a chance to hear what the alarms sound like and they can remind you too! Smoke alarm batteries should be changed once a year. Always do this on the same day such as January 1st. Make it one of your family safety resolutions for each New Year.

- Show your kids where the fire extinguisher is and how to use it.
- Talk with your kids' teachers. What are the school disaster plans? Do they drill them? Volunteer at the school if you can. The more involved you are with your child's school, the more you will understand its practices.
- Volunteer with your homeowners association or neighborhood crime watch. Ask what they do for disasters.
- Check with your local fire department to see if they offer [Community Emergency Response Team](#) training.
- Take a [Red Cross First Aid and CPR class](#).
- Practice your Family Disaster Plan.

## Children and Their Response to Disasters

It is important to [tell children](#), without overly alarming them, about disasters ahead of time. Talk about things that could happen during a disaster, such as the lights or phone not working. Tell children there are many people who can help them during a disaster, so that they will not be afraid of fire fighters, police officers, paramedics, or other emergency officials.



Children respond differently to disasters than do adults. Sometimes it is difficult to tell if/or how severely the child has been affected by the disaster. Here are some common issues that arise in children and how parents can help their children cope after a disaster.



- **Children and Their Daily Routines.** Disasters disrupt our lives in a variety of ways. All disasters whether big or small can change our routines. From school closures to the need to stay in a shelter, children's daily routines undergo a number of changes. Children rely on their routines and changes to these routines can lead to anxiety and other problems. Every effort should be made to return to as much of a routine as possible. This can help children adjust and cope to the after effects of the disaster.
- **A Child's Imagination and Fear.** A child's imagination is a beautiful thing. However, after a disaster this imagination can lead to fear and worry. Parents who stay calm and provide reassurance can help children decrease their worry. It is important to be honest about the situation keeping in mind each child's age and maturity.

After a disaster, it is common for children to be afraid that:

- The event will happen again.
- Someone they care about will be injured or killed.
- They will be separated from their family.
- They will be left alone.

After a disaster, parents should make every effort to reassure children that the event is over, everyone is safe, and that the family will stay together.

- **Common Behaviors after a Disaster.** Children may:
  - Go through a personality change. For example, a quiet, obedient and caring child may become loud, noisy and aggressive or an outgoing child may become shy and afraid.
  - Be upset over the loss of a favorite toy, blanket, teddy bear or other items.
  - Have nightmares or be afraid to sleep alone or with the light off.
  - Become increasingly clingy, and cry and whine more than usual.
  - Revert to younger behavior, such as bedwetting and thumb sucking.
- **Children's Psychological Needs Following a Disaster.** Parents should remember that the psychological effects of a disaster do not disappear once the event has passed. Children can show signs of psychological trauma in the form of nightmares or other problems for up to two years. Children need help and support as soon as possible. Some children may not exhibit signs of distress for weeks to months after the disaster, while some may never show such signs. It is important for parents to closely observe children's behavior. By recognizing problems quickly, parents can access resources for their child to receive extra counseling or attention.

- **How Can Parents Help Children Cope After a Disaster.**

- Talk with children about their concerns and fears. Allow them time to figure out how they feel about what they have gone through.
- Listen to children's concerns, fears, and feelings. Don't judge them for their fears or concerns. Try to understand their feelings despite how irrational you may think they are. Reassure children that the family will stay together and that they will not be left alone.
- The most important role a parent can play in an emergency situation is to stay calm. Provide reassurance through your words and actions.
- Remind children that it is okay to be afraid. They do not need to be brave or tough and that it is okay to cry.
- Include them in recovery efforts. Give them tasks that they can safely get done to empower them and help them see that everything is going to be all right.
- While many things will be out of their control, point out those things they are still in control of and allow them control over simple things such as what to wear, what to eat, or what bed to sleep in.
- Allow them special privileges, such as keeping on a night light while they sleep, for a time after the disaster.
- Find ways to let your children know you love them.

- **Turn Off and Log Off.** Today, we are forever plugged in to the events around us through television and social media. While these tools allow us to stay up to date on a disaster, they may have a negative effect on children. Television news stories, especially those with images, will upset children. Repeated news coverage may make them think the disaster is ongoing or occurring again.

Social media posts of photos and videos from the child's community can be more damaging. Also, wrong information posted to social media could hurt children even more. Parents should limit children's access to TV and social media and make sure that they talk to their children about things seen or read.

- **Some Helpful Activities.**

- Have children draw or paint pictures that show their thoughts and feelings about the event and their experience during and after.
- Have children write a story about the frightening event. For example, start with:
  - "Once upon a time there was a terrible \_\_\_\_\_ and it scared us all.  
This is what happened: \_\_\_\_\_"
  - Make sure to end the story with: "And now we are all safe and sound."
- Sing or create music with your children. Music may help reduce stress; it's good therapy.

Practice your plan with your family every 6 months.

Ask them questions about what to do with different types of disasters. Try to make this fun. Have small rewards.

Keep track.... who answered the most questions correct during the last 6 month review?

Make it a competition!

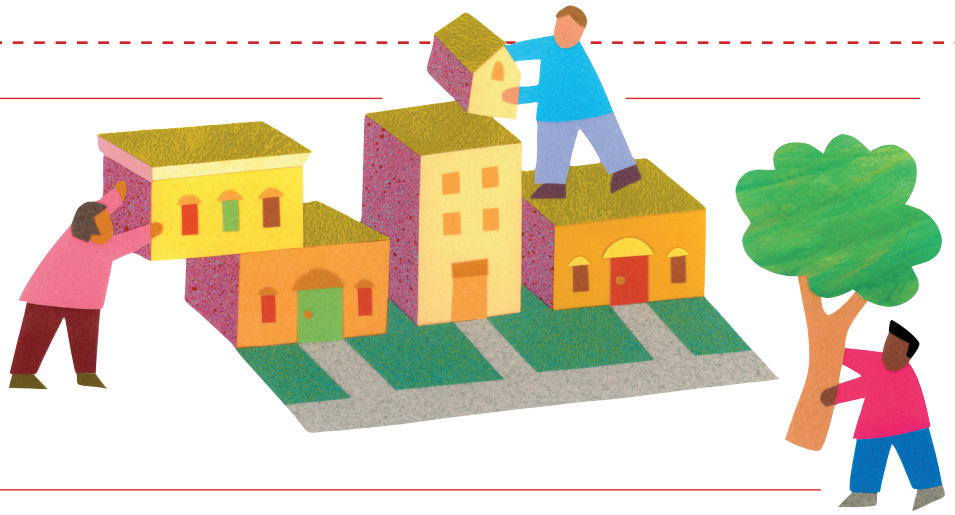
See who will win in the next 6 months! Review your [Disaster Supply Kit](#). Hold scavenger hunts looking for the items that go in your Disaster Supply Kit. Once again, make it fun!





## Appendices

- Forest Fires
- Floods
- Tornados
- Hurricanes
- Severe Weather
- Earthquakes
- Winter Weather
- Infections



## Resources

- AAP Emergency Information Form for Children with Special Needs
- American Red Cross
- American Red Cross Terrorism – Preparing for the Unexpected
- Backpack Emergency Card
- Child ID Card
- Disaster Hero Game Website
- Data Visualization: Disaster Declarations for States and Counties
- Family Supply List
- FEMA Mobile App
- Four Steps to Prepare Your Family for Disasters
- HealthyChildren.org
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
- Ready Wrigley Activity Books
- Red Cross Emergency App
- Ready.gov
- Red Cross First Aid and CPR Class
- Red Cross Shelter App

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## References

- <sup>1</sup> C.S. Mott National Poll on Children's Health Volume 24, Issue 5, October 19, 2015
- <sup>2</sup> Children in Disasters: Do Americans Feel Prepared? A National Survey." Elisaveta Petkova, Jeff Schlegelmilch, Jonathan Sury, Tom Chandler, Cynthia Herrera, Shwetha Bhaskar, Erin Sehnert, Stephanie Martinez, Sabine Marx, Irwin Redlener. National Center for Disaster Preparedness at Columbia University's Earth Institute, Research Brief 2016\_1. (Release date 9 February 2016) <http://dx.doi.org/10.7916/D85M65J9>

Listing of resources does not imply an endorsement by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). The AAP is not responsible for the content of external resources. Information was current at the time of publication. The information contained in this publication should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances.

## Resources Included Throughout Family Readiness Kit

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### **AAP Emergency Information Form for Children with Special Needs**

<http://www2.aap.org/sections/pem/preparedness/blankform.pdf>

### **American Red Cross Mobile Apps**

<http://www.redcross.org/get-help/prepare-for-emergencies/mobile-apps>

### **American Red Cross Shelter App**

<http://app.redcross.org/nss-app/>

### **American Red Cross Training & Certification**

<http://www.redcross.org/m/phssmrd/take-a-class#arcmobile>

### **Backpack Emergency Card**

[http://www.cdc.gov/phpr/readywrigley/documents/backpack\\_emergency\\_card.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/phpr/readywrigley/documents/backpack_emergency_card.pdf)

### **Child ID Card**

<http://identakid.com/>

### **Community Emergency Response Teams**

<http://www.fema.gov/community-emergency-response-teams>

### **Data Visualization: Disaster Declarations for States and Counties**

<https://www.fema.gov/data-visualization-disaster-declarations-states-and-counties>

### **Disaster Declarations**

<http://www.fema.gov/disasters>

### **Disaster Hero**

<http://www.disasterhero.com/>

### **Disaster Supplies List for Families**

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/Family-Disaster-Supplies-List.aspx>

### **Four Steps to Prepare Your Family for Disasters**

<http://patiented.solutions.aap.org/handout.aspx?resultClick=1&gbosid=166214>

### **Getting Your Family Prepared for a Disaster**

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/at-home/Pages/Getting-Your-Family-Prepared-for-a-Disaster.aspx>

### **Hazardous Materials Incidents**

<https://www.ready.gov/hazardous-materials-incidents>

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## **How Climate Change Affects Children: AAP Policy Explained**

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/safety-prevention/all-around/Pages/Climate-Change-Policy-Explained.aspx>

## **If You See Something, Say Something**

<https://www.dhs.gov/see-something-say-something>

## **Infections**

<https://www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/infections/Pages/default.aspx>

## **Make a Disaster Plan for Your Pets**

[http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/animal\\_rescue/tips/pets-disaster.html](http://www.humanesociety.org/issues/animal_rescue/tips/pets-disaster.html)

## **National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration**

<http://www.noaa.gov/>

## **Ready Wrigley Activity Books**

<http://www.cdc.gov/phpr/readywrigley/>

## **Severe Weather**

<https://www.ready.gov/severe-weather>

## **Terrorism – Preparing for the Unexpected**

[http://www.redcross.org/images/MEDIA\\_CustomProductCatalog/m4440084\\_Terrorism.pdf](http://www.redcross.org/images/MEDIA_CustomProductCatalog/m4440084_Terrorism.pdf)

## **10 Tips for Earthquake Safety**

[http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/10TIPS\\_EARTHQUAKESAFETY.PDF](http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/10TIPS_EARTHQUAKESAFETY.PDF)

## **10 Tips for Keeping Children Safe in Cold Weather**

<http://www.savethechildren.org/site/c.8rKLIXMGIpI4E/b.8953697/>

## **10 Tips for Keeping Children Safe in a Flood**

[http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/TEN\\_TIPS\\_FOR\\_FLOOD\\_SAFETY\\_FINAL.PDF](http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/TEN_TIPS_FOR_FLOOD_SAFETY_FINAL.PDF)

## **10 Tips for Keeping Children Safe in a Hurricane**

[http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/10TIPS\\_HURRICANE.PDF](http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/10TIPS_HURRICANE.PDF)

## **10 Tips for Keeping Children Safe in a Tornado**

[http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/10TIPS\\_TORNADO.PDF](http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/10TIPS_TORNADO.PDF)

## **10 Tips for Keeping Children Safe in a Wildfire**

[http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/TEN\\_TIPS\\_FOR\\_WILDFIRE\\_SAFETY\\_FINAL.PDF](http://www.savethechildren.org/atf/cf/%7B9def2ebe-10ae-432c-9bd0-df91d2eba74a%7D/TEN_TIPS_FOR_WILDFIRE_SAFETY_FINAL.PDF)

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