

HOW TO CREATE A FAMILY SAFETY PLAN

Because protecting yourself often means planning for the people who depend on you.

WHAT IS A FAMILY SAFETY PLAN?

Simply put, a Family Safety Plan is a set of practical steps your family agrees on ahead of time to help everyone respond to an emergency.

Whether you're dealing with a house fire, natural disaster, medical emergency, threatening individual, or unexpected situation that requires you to leave quickly, having a plan can reduce confusion and help everyone understand what to do.

A Family Safety Plan should address the needs of everyone in your household, including children, aging parents, individuals with disabilities, and pets.

It doesn't need to be complicated, and it certainly doesn't need to frighten your children.

The goal is preparation, not paranoia.

01 | IDENTIFY YOUR FAMILY'S NEEDS

Every family is different, and your plan should reflect your actual circumstances.

Start by considering:

- Who lives in your household?
- Are there young children who need assistance?
- Does anyone have medical conditions, mobility limitations, or special care requirements?
- Are there family members who may need additional help understanding or following instructions?
- Do you have pets that would need to be evacuated?
- Are there times when family members are regularly separated by work, school, or other activities?

Your goal: Identify who may need assistance and what resources would be necessary during an emergency.

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02 | ESTABLISH EMERGENCY CONTACTS

Everyone in your household should know how to contact help.

Create a list that includes:

- ☐ Emergency services (911 in the United States)
- ☐ Parents or primary caregivers
- ☐ Trusted relatives or family friends
- ☐ Neighbors who can assist
- ☐ Schools and childcare providers
- ☐ Medical providers when applicable
- ☐ An out-of-area emergency contact

For younger children, consider keeping a printed emergency contact card in their backpack or another appropriate location.

Teach children how to call emergency services, provide their location, and explain what is happening in age-appropriate language.

Your goal: Make sure everyone knows who to contact when something goes wrong.

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03 | IDENTIFY SAFE LOCATIONS & MEETING PLACES

If your family becomes separated during an emergency, where will everyone go?

Establish at least two meeting locations.

PRIMARY MEETING LOCATION

A safe, easily identifiable place near your home that family members can reach during a localized emergency.

SECONDARY MEETING LOCATION

A location farther away in case your neighborhood or immediate area becomes unsafe or inaccessible.

Consider:

- A trusted neighbor's home
- A nearby community location
- A relative's residence
- A designated evacuation or reunification site

Make sure meeting locations are appropriate for the emergency. For example, a location near your home may not be safe during a wildfire or neighborhood evacuation.

Your goal: Give everyone a clear destination if you cannot remain together.

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04 | CREATE A FAMILY COMMUNICATION PLAN

Emergencies don't always happen when everyone is home.

Children may be at school, parents may be working, and family members may be traveling.

Discuss:

- Who should be contacted first?
- What happens if someone doesn't answer?
- Who can pick up children if parents are unavailable?
- How will family members communicate if phone calls aren't working?
- Where will everyone find updates during an evacuation?

Consider establishing a trusted out-of-area contact who can help relay information between family members.

Text messages may sometimes get through when phone networks are congested, but no single communication method is guaranteed.

Your goal: Establish a communication plan that doesn't depend entirely on one person or one device.

05 | PRACTICE LEAVING SAFELY

Your family should understand how to leave your home or another location during an emergency.

Discuss:

- Primary and alternate exits
- How to evacuate during a fire
- What to do if an exit is blocked
- Where to meet after leaving
- When to call emergency services
- Why nobody should reenter an unsafe building

Practice your household evacuation plan periodically.

For children, keep these conversations simple and age-appropriate.

Instead of focusing on frightening possibilities, explain that families practice safety plans for the same reason schools conduct fire drills.

Your goal: Help everyone understand how to get somewhere safe without unnecessary confusion.

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06 | TEACH CHILDREN WHAT TO DO WHEN THEY FEEL UNSAFE

Children should understand that personal safety includes recognizing uncomfortable situations, setting boundaries, and asking trusted adults for help.

Teach them:

- They can say no to unwanted physical contact.
- They do not have to keep secrets about threats, inappropriate touching, or unsafe behavior.
- They can leave an uncomfortable situation and seek help.
- They should tell a trusted adult when someone makes them feel unsafe.
- They can ask another trusted adult for help if the first person doesn't listen.
- They should never follow someone simply because that person claims to know their parents.

Discuss the difference between a surprise and a secret that makes someone feel scared, uncomfortable, or unsafe.

Most importantly: Children should never be responsible for physically intervening in violence between adults.

Their priority is getting somewhere safe and contacting help.

Your goal: Give children clear, realistic options without making them responsible for adult safety.

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07 | PREPARE FOR EMERGENCIES

Consider what your family would need if you had to leave home unexpectedly.

Your preparations might include:

- ☐ A Go Bag for each household member, as appropriate
- ☐ Essential medications and medical supplies
- ☐ Important documents and identification
- ☐ Emergency contact information
- ☐ Food, water, and basic supplies
- ☐ Baby or childcare necessities
- ☐ Pet food, leashes, and carriers
- ☐ Phone chargers and backup power
- ☐ Transportation alternatives
- ☐ Weather-appropriate clothing

For younger children, a familiar comfort item may help reduce stress during an emergency.

Remember that emergency supplies should be appropriate for your family's needs and the situations you're preparing for.

Your goal: Reduce the number of things you'll need to gather or decide during an emergency.

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08 | ESTABLISH AGE-APPROPRIATE RESPONSIBILITIES

A Family Safety Plan works best when everyone understands their role.

Responsibilities should be realistic and appropriate for each person's age and abilities.

For example:

YOUNG CHILDREN

- Follow the designated caregiver.
- Move to the agreed-upon safe location.
- Ask a trusted adult for help.

OLDER CHILDREN & TEENS

- Know emergency contacts and meeting locations.
- Understand how to call for assistance.
- Follow the family's communication plan.
- Help younger siblings only when doing so does not place them in danger.

ADULTS & CAREGIVERS

- Assist household members who need help.
- Coordinate evacuation and transportation.
- Communicate with emergency services.
- Account for family members when safe to do so.

Your goal: Make sure everyone understands what they should do without assigning responsibilities beyond their capabilities.

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09 | REVIEW & PRACTICE YOUR PLAN

A Family Safety Plan isn't something you create once and forget.

Review your plan when:

- You move to a new home.
- Children change schools or childcare providers.
- Family responsibilities change.
- Someone develops new medical or mobility needs.
- Emergency contacts or phone numbers change.
- You adopt a pet.
- Your family experiences a significant change in circumstances.

Practice appropriate parts of your plan periodically.

Keep emergency contact information current and make sure everyone understands any changes.

Your goal: Keep your plan practical, familiar, and useful.

PUT IT INTO PRACTICE

YOUR FAMILY SAFETY PLAN CHECKLIST

Start by completing these seven tasks:

- ☐ Identify everyone who needs to be included in your plan.
- ☐ Create a list of emergency contacts.
- ☐ Choose primary and secondary meeting locations.
- ☐ Establish a family communication and reunification plan.
- ☐ Identify primary and alternate evacuation routes.
- ☐ Review emergency supplies and individual needs.
- ☐ Schedule a family conversation or practice session.

You don't have to complete everything in one day.

Start with the basics and build from there.

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A SPECIAL NOTE ABOUT DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

If your household is experiencing domestic violence, stalking, or coercive control, a general Family Safety Plan may not be sufficient.

Discussing plans openly, documenting meeting locations, or storing emergency supplies could increase danger if an abusive person discovers them.

A qualified domestic violence advocate can help develop an individualized safety plan that considers children, custody arrangements, communication, transportation, and other important circumstances.

For confidential assistance in the United States, contact the National Domestic Violence Hotline at 800-799-SAFE (7233) or visit thehotline.org.

REMEMBER

Your children don't need to know everything that could go wrong. They need to know what to do when something does.

A Family Safety Plan cannot prevent every emergency, but it can help your household recognize available options, communicate effectively, and respond with greater confidence.

Keep your conversations age-appropriate, your expectations realistic, and your plans flexible.

Preparation creates options. Practice builds confidence.

KEEP LEARNING. KEEP GROWING.

Knowledge is just the beginning. Take your training further with our free and paid online courses at Hero Self Defense Academy, where you'll build practical skills, strengthen your awareness, and learn to take a proactive approach to your personal safety.

Visit meangirlselfdefense.com to explore our training programs, find an instructor, or register for an upcoming seminar.

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