

The Daily Parent

Special Focus: KEEPING YOUR CHILD SAFE IN TODAY'S WORLD

Working families who depend on others to keep their children safe may feel especially vulnerable in today's uncertain world.

Although you can't control the uncertainty, you can plan with your family to minimize danger and to know what to do if something catastrophic occurs. A review of your child care provider's security and disaster preparedness measures, reminders to your child about being cautious in specific situations, and some thoughtful pre-planning can increase your peace of mind.

Your Child Care Arrangement

Good child care centers provide inviting environments that welcome those who enter. Today's world, however, requires controlled access so that only visitors with legitimate reasons for entering are allowed in.



How is access to the building controlled? Some centers use key pads; others give parents card keys, similar to those in hotels. If your center employs these devices, are the codes or card keys changed regularly?

If your center does not have these devices, is there someone who greets visitors? Can s/he turn away those who do not belong or keep them out of the areas in which children are present? Can s/he quickly summon assistance?

If your child care program is in a community center open to the public, what is the plan to protect the children if there is a threat to the building or the people in it?

Does your provider have an evacuation plan when warned of hazardous conditions? If the center will be sheltering others, will your child remain with familiar children and staff?

Your provider's ability to keep your child safe depends on current emergency information. If your work, home, cell phone or fax number changes, if your emergency contact names,

addresses or phones change, if there is a change in who can pick up your child, if your child's physician changes, or if you will be out of town, make sure the provider knows.

Emergency information should not only be current, it should be comprehensive. Knowledge Learning Corporation has developed an Emergency Card that includes identification details as well as contact information and is available free from the company's Web site (www.knowledgelearning.com) or at their child care centers. *

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KEEPING YOUR CHILD SAFE

Help Locate Your Lost Child By:

- * Always carrying a current photo of your child
- * Knowing exactly what your child is wearing
- * Dressing your child in bright colors that are easy to spot in a crowd
- * Using your voice. Although your child may not be able to see you, he may be able to hear you.
- * Notifying security guards and store managers. Many destinations such as stores, malls, or theme parks have standard procedures for searching for lost children and securing the premises until they are found.
- * Making sure your child knows where you are staying when the family is away from your home city. If you are staying with friends or relatives, write their name and phone number on a small piece of paper and put it in your child's pocket or shoe. If you are staying at a hotel, do the same with a small item with the hotel's name and number on it.

Stranger Danger



Most preschoolers can understand the idea of “strangers” and the importance of not going anywhere with a stranger or accepting anything from a stranger. Simple explanations work best. *A stranger is someone whose name you don't know. If a stranger asks you for help, tell him to ask another grown-up.*

Remind your child never to approach a car, occupied or not, unless accompanied by an adult and never to accept a ride from someone he doesn't know.

Think twice about allowing your child to go out outside alone, even in the “safest” of neighborhoods. When your child goes outside, have him tell you where he is going. *

If Your Child Gets Lost

Before you head out on an excursion with your child, make sure he knows his address and phone number, *your* first and last name, and what to do if you become separated. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and the National Crime Prevention Council offer the following suggestions:

Tell your preschool age child to sit right down on the ground if he gets lost and you will come to get him. Stress that he should not go look for you but he can call *Mommy* or *Daddy* so that you can hear him and other people will know he's lost.

A five or six-year-old should also stay in one spot, but she can watch for a “safe adult”—a woman with a child, a sales clerk in a uniform or at a cash register, a security guard or policeman—to tell that she's lost.

An older child should memorize the phone number of a close friend or relative so that he can ask a “safe adult” to call that person. Also, teach your child how to use a public pay phone and how to call 9-1-1. *



For Your Reference

The Daily Parent is published 4 times a year. If you would like to order any of the past issues, visit Child Care Aware's Web site at www.childcareaware.org or call 202-393-5501 ext. 115 for more information. *

RESOURCES *Check these Web sites for additional information:*

- * www.parenting.com (*Parenting* magazine)
- * www.fci.org (*Family Communications*, articles by Fred Rogers with Hedda Sharapan)
- * www.missingkids.com (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children)
- * www.ncpc.org (National Crime Prevention Council)
- * www.childcareaware.org (to locate the child care resource and referral agency in your area)

Disaster Preparedness

Many parents are experienced in preparing for natural disasters. They have thought about how to keep their children safe when the family is together at home. But how can they prepare for a disaster that occurs while they are at work and their children are in child care?

Communication is key. Again, your child care provider needs current phone numbers for you and your emergency contacts. Since local phone service may be unreliable or you

may not be able to get home to receive calls, have an out-of-town contact to serve as "information central". All members of your household should know who that is and commit the number to memory; your provider should have that name and number as well.

As heroic as caregivers may be in protecting the children in their care, they worry about their own families. How will your provider maintain coverage when caregivers feel compelled to be with their loved ones? If the

child care facility is no longer safe, will the program operate in an alternate location?

Is your own job essential to the disaster recovery effort? Will you be required to work additional hours or different shifts or at a different location? Will your child care be available in these situations? More important, does the staff have the sensitivity and skill to comfort your child when your lives are so disrupted and your child may be in distress. *

Should Your Child Care Be Near Home or Near Work?

In the event of a disaster, every parent's first thought is to immediately find and protect his or her child, to see first-hand that the child is safe, to comfort the child and remove him from harm's way. When your child's care is at or near your work place, the physical distance and time to reach your child in an emergency is minimized. However, if your work site is at a location that could become congested and chaotic during a mass evacuation, or if your job often takes you away from your work site during the day while your child remains on or near the premises, the hoped-for advantages of this arrangement are rapidly replaced by increased stress.

With care closer to home, the time it takes to travel from your work place to your child is an eternity. If traffic is re-routed or public transportation services are disrupted, it's even worse. Nonetheless, it may be possible for a relative or trusted friend or neighbor to reach your child before you

can and provide comfort and reassurance in a safe haven.

Natural disasters can happen anywhere. Children are not necessarily safer in their home neighborhoods than in downtown office buildings or industrial parks when tornados or earthquakes occur. It's the potential threat of deliberate acts designed to inflict casualties that causes some parents to want to keep their children secure within their own neighborhoods while creating in others the desire to have their children as close as possible.

The choice of care near home or near work is a very personal one. In this changed world, disaster preparedness may be a new deciding factor, but the traditional elements of availability, cost, and quality still apply. Your local child care resource and referral agency can help you think through your choices and, perhaps, uncover alternatives you hadn't considered. *

Knowledge Learning Corporation, as part of its Emergency Tool Kit for Parents, includes the following suggestions:

- * Create a disaster plan with your family. See <http://www.disasterrelief.org/Library/Prepare/displan.html>
- * Explain the dangers of fire, severe weather, and earthquakes to children and how to respond to each.
- * Draw or have your children draw a floor plan of your home, marking mark two ways out of every room.
- * Have children gather what they will need in their personal emergency supplies, such as one change of clothing and footwear, one blanket or sleeping bag, food, and water. See <http://www.disasterrelief.org/Library/Prepare/supplies.html>
- * Make sure you have special items for your infant: formula, diapers, bottles, powdered milk, and medications.
- * Create a plan to take care of pets. It could be very upsetting for a child to lose a pet in addition to experiencing a disaster. See <http://www.disasterrelief.org/Library/Prepare/pets.html>
- * Quiz your children regarding disaster plans and conduct a drill every six months.

For More Information

For more information about choosing child care, call the Child Care Resource and Referral Agency (CCR&R) which serves your community. To find the number of the CCR&R in your area, contact Child Care Aware 1.800.424.2246. www.ChildCareAware.org

***The Daily Parent* is prepared by NACCRRRA, Washington, DC, with funding by the Citigroup Foundation.**

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Design: Alliant Studios. Photos courtesy of The Child Care Group, Dallas, Texas.



★ **How Can Parents Plan to Keep Their Children Safe in Emergency Situations?**