

Emergency Disaster Preparation in Child Care

KRS 199.895 and amendments to child care regulation are to prepare child care providers for the possibility of disaster. The possibility of disaster always exists in the form of natural disasters: tornados or hurricanes, fires, floods, earthquakes, or ice storms and a potentially violent situation, like a hostage situation, or intruder, non-custodial parent, or parent under the influence. Also unplanned acts, such as a chemical spills may require evacuation of children to other sites. Furthermore, power outages or transportation problems could delay parents and require you to care for children longer than expected.

Regardless of the disaster, child caregivers should be prepared to provide safe, high quality care for children. Disaster preparation for providers and teachers of young children requires development of policy and procedures, staff training, and practice. The needs of each program are unique, depending upon number and ages of children, location, and available community resources. This information provides guidelines to help develop a plan that will work for your child care program.

When developing policy and procedures, remember there are basically three responses to a disaster or emergency situation:

lock-down, shelter in, or evacuate.

Lock-down may be a response to a potentially violent situation, such as a trespasser, non-custodial parent, or inappropriate parent behavior. The first step in this response is the warning system, a program-wide communication system through which you can broadcast a phrase, such as "We have pineapple for snack today," which staff will recognize as "lock-down" but which will not alert/antagonize the intruder. Have staff regularly practice lock-down procedures, such as closing and locking all doors, turning off lights, and sitting quietly with the children. Do a head count and make sure all children are in the room. Have a planned quiet activity to keep children calm, such as storytelling.

"Shelter in" is necessary when it is safer for children and staffs to remain in the building rather than evacuate or have parents come for pick-up. For example, parents might be unable to come due to power outage or traffic breakdown. Other situations might include severe weather, an airborne contaminant, or a potentially violent situation.

Again, what is your warning system to notify staff? For weather condition early warning, have a weather radio or community sirens. Also, have an alarm system within the program. Identify the safest place in the building for situations such as a tornados, earthquakes, or airborne contaminants. Practice to make sure everyone get there quickly and safely and that there is sufficient room.

Evacuation may be necessary in some disaster situations. A fire, gas leak, or nearby ground chemical spill requires immediate evacuation; while the threat of severe weather may provide limited time to prepare children and gather supplies.

When the warning system sounds, evacuation requires immediate action; regular practice is essential to a quick and safe evacuation. All child care staff should know two exit routes from every room in the building. Evacuate to the safe meeting place; designate a place that is away from the building and emergency vehicle parking area, can be accessed without crossing traffic routes, and is visible. Plan and practice ways to quickly move young children from the building. Infants, toddlers, and children with disabilities may best be transported in rolling portable cribs covered with fire blankets. Preschoolers may hold hands or hold a rope with knots; practice "follow-the-leader." As you practice evacuation, remember to have items you will need. Always know how many children are in attendance each day, and do frequent head counts. If evacuating to an off-site safe shelter, make sure staff know who is responsible for each child throughout the situation and all staff are familiar with the emergency disaster plan for your child care program.

For assistance in completing an evacuation plan required for child-care centers and family child-care homes per KRS 199.895 please visit the Division of Child Care Emergency Disaster Preparedness Technical Assistance for child care guide at :

http://training.chfs.ky.gov/Child_Care_Preparedness/html/index.html