

Program Operations Safety: Emergency Preparedness, Response, and Recovery (Video 3)

Andy Hashikawa: Hello. I'm Doctor Andy Hashikawa. I'll be your host for this episode of Keeping Them Safe. Today's topic is emergency preparedness, response, and recovery, and how to prepare for emergencies in your programs, centers, and family childcare homes.

Requirements for your programs vary greatly from state to state. Most states, territories, tribes, or local health departments may have different regulations, training requirements, or other procedures in place. It is important to understand and follow your state or local regulations. Early childhood programs play an important role in keeping children safe during emergencies and disasters by developing and implementing plans for preparation, response, and recovery. Emergencies happen suddenly and can be devastating to programs and communities. It is important to prepare by taking steps to ensure your early childhood education program is safe before, during and after an emergency.

There are two types of emergencies for which you should prepare: natural disasters, such as a hurricane or tornado, or an emergency involving an intruder or an expected injury, leaving little time to prepare or respond. Illnesses and injuries may impact a child, staff, parent, volunteer, or visitor. As an early child educator, you should know how to respond quickly and appropriately to situations that could happen in your program, center, or home. Four important steps to help prepare for emergencies and disasters are: develop written plans that detail what should be done during an emergency or disaster; inform staff, and families, and children about the plan; regularly practice protocols, communication strategies and evacuation drills; partner with local emergency and disaster experts to develop and practice emergency and disaster plans. Next, I'll share information from Caring for Our Children, a collection of best practice standards for early care and education programs.

Now, let's talk about disaster planning, training, and communication. Your program can prepare for a natural or man-made disaster by developing and implementing a written plan with policies, procedures, and protocols, which include disasters likely to occur in your area, plans for conducting regular drills, notifying and communicating with parents in various situations. Remember: Emergency and evacuation drills and exercises are an important safety practice in areas where natural disasters and/or violent hostile intruder events may occur. Routinely practicing these drills fosters a calm, competent response to any disaster that may occur. It's also very important to work with local emergency service experts like police or fire departments to develop and evaluate existing plans. At the end of this episode, be sure to check out the online training available, as well as resources for staff and families on the video landing page.

Emergencies related to injuries, both intentional and unintentional, that can sometimes happen from maltreatment or lack of supervision are referred to as incidents. Your facility or home should have a written plan for reporting and managing incidents or unusual occurrences that are threatening to the health, safety, or welfare that children, staff, or volunteers. Your

program should have procedures and protocols for responding to incidents and how you will provide training to staff on these procedures. Your timely response to these emergencies can keep children, families, and staff safe. Your program should have a plan in place to manage, document, and report incidents like a lost or missing child, injuries to children that require first aid, medical or dental care, illnesses or injuries requiring hospitalization or emergency treatment, mental health emergencies. To see a more complete list of incidents, please visit the link for Caring for Our Children on the video landing page.

You should also have a plan for incidents that require urgent medical care. This plan should provide procedures that address who will accompany a child to get urgent medical care and remain with them until a parent or guardian assumes responsibility for the child; who will provide medical care personnel with documentation on authorization for emergency medical care and permission to share the child's health records with other service provider; who will provide backup care for large and small family childcare homes to make the arrangement for urgent care feasible while maintaining the ratios; who and how parents or guardians will be notified using emergency contact numbers, which should be routinely updated. You'll find a more complete list of incidents and urgent care scenarios on the video landing page.

Before we close, I have three reflective questions for you. What are your program plans for preparing, responding, and recovering from an emergency or disaster? Are your plans clearly written and have been reviewed by a local emergency expert? How do you ensure you clearly communicated your emergency preparedness plans to staff and families?

Thank you for spending this time with me. We will see you on another episode of Keeping Them Safe. Remember: The more you learn, the safer they are.