How to Create a Family Emergency Communication Plan and C

Family Life · about 24 minutes · 2026-11-06

Help household members reconnect when phones, power, work, school, or transport routines are disrupted. These 22 steps cover out-of-area contacts, wallet cards, accessible meeting places, children, caregivers, pets, offline copies, power reserves, communication drills, and annual reviews.

Things you will need

- A household contact and access-needs list
- An agreed out-of-area contact
- Wallet-sized cards and a central home copy
- Paper maps and downloaded offline route information
- Charged power banks, suitable cables, and a radio where appropriate
- Copies for emergency kits, school or work bags, and secure digital storage

Collecting Contacts and Choosing Meeting Places

1. **Bring the household together and list members**
   Bring the household together and identify who belongs in the plan.
2. **Collect contacts and individual access needs**
   Collect essential contact details and individual access needs.
3. **Make a wallet card for each person**
   Make a durable wallet-sized contact card for every person.
4. **Choose meeting places at three distances**
   Choose safe meeting places at increasing distances from home.
5. **Walk the routes before you need them**
   Discuss routes and transport before anyone needs to use them.

Deciding How Everyone Will Communicate

6. **Set a check-in order and message method**
   Set a simple check-in order and preferred message method.
7. **Use the out-of-area contact as a relay**
   Use the out-of-area contact as a relay rather than a substitute for local emergency help.
8. **Coordinate with schools and workplaces**
   Coordinate with schools, childcare, workplaces, and caregivers.
9. **Add pets and service animals to the plan**
   Include pets and service animals in the communication arrangements.
10. **Agree on a private short message format**
    Agree on a short message format that protects privacy.

Preparing Offline Contact Tools and Power

11. Save contacts beyond a locked device

Save essential contacts and instructions for offline use.

12. Prepare power and radios for outages

Prepare power and receiving equipment for likely local disruptions.

13. Keep addresses and maps available offline

Keep addresses and route information available without a network connection.

14. Store copies in several secure places

Store copies in several secure and accessible places.

Practicing the Plan as a Household

15. Run a short separation drill

Run a short drill based on a realistic separation scenario.

16. Practice real messages and meeting walks

Practice the actual message and meeting actions safely.

17. Rehearse each person's own role

Let children, caregivers, and support-network members rehearse their own roles.

18. Fix one weak point after each drill

Review the drill and fix one weak point at a time.

Keeping the Plan Current and Usable

19. Review contact details every year

Review contact details at least annually and whenever circumstances change.

20. Match the plan to local procedures

Check that your plan still matches school, workplace, building, and local procedures.

21. Adapt the plan for travel and visitors

Adapt the plan for travel, visitors, and temporary household changes.

22. Hold an after-action review after a real incident

Use a real incident as a careful after-action review.

Sources

1. Family Emergency Communication Plan — Fillable Card
   https://www.ready.gov/sites/default/files/2025-06/family-communication-plan_fillable-card.pdf
2. How to Make Your Emergency Plan
   https://www.redcross.org/about-us/news-and-events/news/2019/national-preparedness-month-how-to-make-your-emergency-plan.html
3. Are You Ready? An In-Depth Guide to Citizen Preparedness
   https://www.ready.gov/sites/default/files/2021-11/are-you-ready-guide.pdf
4. Plan Ahead for Your Pets
   https://www.ready.gov/pets
5. Power Outages
   https://www.ready.gov/power-outages

Written as a checklist from https://www.howcompass.com/how-to/Create-a-Family-Emergency-Communication-Plan-and-Contact-Card. Correcti