

Hurricane Preparedness: Let Children Participate

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GUAYNABO, Puerto Rico – Disaster planning should be a family affair. Making every member a part of the plan is an opportunity to talk about a difficult subject in a less stressful environment.

Good plans reduce decision-making during an actual crisis so it is a good idea to prepare in advance.

Children can be particularly vulnerable to stress as a result of disasters and might even suffer from anxiety because of the disruption of family routines. When children feel safe it gives parents peace of mind.

Here are some tips that can help families prepare children for hurricane season.

General Well-being:

- Encourage them to talk. Let them talk about the disaster and ask questions. Address their doubts as best as you can.
- Understand their fears. Take their fears seriously. Tell them that it's okay to be scared.
- Keep them informed. Explain what is needed in simple words. Don't overwhelm them with repeated news updates and limit their access to graphic media.

Preparedness Process:

- Include them in the crafting of the family emergency plan. Making plans ahead of time will help everybody in the family feel more prepared when disaster strikes.
- Help them build their emergency kit. Teach them about what they should include. Let them choose some of the things they want to put in their kit like their favorite stuffed animals, board games, books and crayons.



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- Teach them what to do in case of emergency. If your kids are old enough to use a phone, teach them how to dial 9-1-1 and when they should do so. Also teach them that for other situations it might be better to send a text message because a call might not get through.

Health and Nutrition:

- Think of a balanced menu when buying supplies. Stock up on non-perishable food that is also nutritious like nuts, dried fruit, cereal, cereal bars, applesauce, canned fruit, etc. Have plenty of potable water.
- Introduce them to new food now. Start introducing them to non-perishable foods that may be new to them now. That way they don't have to struggle with too many dietary changes after the emergency.
- Talk to your pediatrician. Speak to your pediatrician or other medical professionals about their emergency plans. Ask them to recommend an alternate pediatrician for emergencies and ask for copies of your children's medical records, just in case.

Sheltering:

- Prepare them for the experience. Explain what it means to evacuate to a shelter.
- Bring some comfort. It is important for your children to bring their favorite blanket, stuffed animal or toy to the shelter.

Children with Special Needs:

- Consider the special equipment needed. If your child uses medical equipment such as a ventilator, consider having a backup generator if the power goes out and fuel to power the generator.
- Remember details that make a difference. For children and individuals with autism, it may be helpful to include a fidget toy, squishy ball or similar item in their emergency kit.
- If needed, prepare a sensory kit. A sensory kit for children can include weighted vests, wrist/anklet bands and blanket, chew toys, fidget toys, sensory brushes, squishy balls, picture exchange communication systems, sound blocking head phones, pop-up tents and crawling tunnels.



Some Resources Available:

<http://www.ready.gov/kids>

<https://www.cdc.gov/phpr/readywrigley/>

<https://www.cdc.gov/phpr/readywrigley/books.htm>

For more information on Puerto Rico's recovery from Hurricane María, visit fema.gov/disaster/4339.

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Disaster recovery assistance is available without regard to race, color, religion, nationality, sex, age, disability, English proficiency or economic status. If you or someone you know has been discriminated against, call FEMA toll-free at 800-621-FEMA (3362) 711/VRS - Video Relay Service). Multilingual operators are available. (Press 2 for Spanish). TTY call 800-462-7585.

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