



## How to Make an Emergency Communication Plan

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To make sure you can find loved ones if separated during an emergency, you'll need to follow these six steps.

**1. Print a Hard Copy of Contacts** - Few of us have our loved ones' phone numbers memorized (I'm certainly guilty of this). If anything should happen to our phones, we'd have no way of calling them. Thus, on the most basic level, your emergency communication plan needs to include a backup contact list.

### ***What contacts to include?***

- Phone numbers of family members and anyone else involved in your communication plan
- Work, school, childcare, etc. contact info
- Address of meeting places
- Local hospitals and police stations
- Resources like local emergency shelters
- Medical providers and other important services
- List of which channels will be broadcasting emergency info

### ***Where to keep the hard copy?***

Print out copies of the contacts. Ideally you should laminate them so they are waterproof, but this will make them harder to fold and fit in a wallet. Give everyone copies to keep in their wallets, purses or school bags.

It's also good practice to have a backup copy anywhere you go frequently, such as at home, work, and school as well as in your car.

**2. Create a Digital Copy of Documents (Bug Out Binder)** - An "emergency binder" contains your emergency contact list and important documents like your IDs, birth certificates, prescriptions, insurance info, etc. It also will include photos of your loved ones; heaven forbid you get separated, you will have current photos to post on missing people boards.

For example, an emergency shelter might not release your child to you without proof of ID. Or a hospital might not release patient information without proof of relationship.

Hard copies of these documents should be kept in your Bug Out Bag. You also want to keep a secure digital copy.

I keep them on an encrypted USB drive on my keychain as well as on the cloud.

If I were to lose the hard copy of contacts in my wallet, I would still be able to access my contacts list – even though it may take a while to get online or to a computer.

**3. Program an ICE Number in Phones** - If family members are injured or incapacitated, they won't be able to make contact. It is vital you program an *In Case of Emergency (ICE)* number in everyone's phone. Emergency responders know to look for this number.

***Remember ICE numbers need to be accessible even when the screen is locked. To do this:***

- On an iPhone, you can use the built-in Health app
- On Android, you can download the ICE app
- On Samsung Galaxy phones, you can add an emergency contact under the built-in Contacts app

**4. Modes of Communication** - This refers to the ways you will get in contact with each other during an emergency. The more methods you have, the more likely you will be able to get in touch quickly.

- **Cell Phones** - FEMA and other disaster agencies actually recommend against using cell phones. After disasters, cell phone lines often become flooded in what's known as a mass call event. The lines get tied up and calls can't get

through. Worse, emergency calls aren't able to get through because of all the people trying to check in on their loved ones.

- **Text Messaging** - Text messaging doesn't use as much network bandwidth as calling, so texts are more likely to go through even when the network is congested. Texting also won't tie up the network like calling, which is why FEMA recommends texts for communication.

**Tips:** Create a group in your phone. Then you can send a message to everyone in your emergency contacts at once. There are apps like GroupMe which make group texting easier.

Pack a portable solar power bank in your survival bag so you can keep using your cell for emergency communications even with the power out.

- **\*\*Landlines\*\*** - Landlines use copper wires which are buried underground, making them less likely to be damaged during natural disasters than cell phone towers. They also don't require electricity to work. So, make sure you have landline numbers in your emergency contacts list.

**Tips:** Choose a corded landline phone. Cordless phones require electricity and won't work during power outages.

If you have call forwarding on your landline, forward calls to your cell number during an emergency. This way you will still get incoming calls, such as during an evacuation.

- **Social Media Messaging** - Social media and email are great ways to get bulk messages out to friends and family during disasters. Just send one message or status report to everyone to let them know you are okay instead of wasting precious network space to call each individually.

**Tip:** Make sure you know your social media passwords in case you need to access your profile from someone else's computer or phone.

- **Two-Way Radios** - If you really want to take your family communication plan to the next level, you can get two-way radios. These have their drawbacks, like having a limited range, but are often the most reliable communication method in major disasters like large grid outages.
- **Written Messages** - As a last resort, you can use written messages to share vital information. For example, if you must evacuate your primary meeting point, you might write a message on the wall. There are some obvious downsides to this. You won't know for sure whether your family members will

see the message, and the message could get destroyed by fire, flood... But it is an easy way to communicate where you have gone.

**\*\*5. Choose a Central Contact - \*\***A central contact is someone located out of state. The reason the central contact must be out of state is because, during local disasters, local networks may be overloaded but long-distance calls will still usually go through.

If you are unable to get in touch with family members through any of the methods listed in #4, then you will call the central contact instead.

Have each family member call at established intervals to give updates. For example:

- **Dad:** Call on the hour (1:00, 2:00, 3:00...)
- **Mom:** Call at 15 past (1:15, 2:15, 3:15...)
- **Child:** Call at 30 past (1:30, 2:30, 3:30...)

The Central Contact will give each family member news and updates each time they call. Keep calling until the family is reunited.

**\*\*6. Set Meeting Points - \*\***The next part of your family communication plan is meeting points. These are the places where you will go if in danger or to reunite. Depending on the type of emergency, you will need multiple meeting points.

- **Primary meeting point:** This will probably be your home.
- **Neighborhood meeting point:** This is where you will go if your home is unsafe but neighborhood is not affected.
- **City/town meeting point:** If you aren't at home when the disaster hits and can't get home, this is where you will go. It should be a safe location, preferably with a storm shelter, and located nearby places you attend frequently. For example, you might choose a hospital located halfway between you and your spouse's workplace. Or you might choose your children's school as the meeting point.
- **Out of town meeting point:** This is where you will go if the entire region has become unsafe and you need to evacuate without your family. It might be a relative's home in the next city or state. Read more about how to make an evacuation plan.

**\*\*Other Tips: \*\***If you have children: Make sure you know the emergency procedures at your kids' schools/daycares so you will know where they will be located and how to get in contact.

*Preserve phone battery life:* Turn off all unneeded apps, turn off mobile data, and reduce screen brightness to save your battery.

*Keep an emergency power bank:* As part of your EDC, you should have a power bank with you. There are now tiny power banks like the Anker PowerCore+ Mini. It's the size of a lipstick and can recharge most phone batteries 1-2 times.

*Sign up for disaster alerts:* Learn more about the options here. Also check if your children's school district has an alert system.

\*After a disaster: \*Mark yourself as "Safe" on Facebook and register yourself as "Safe and Well" on the American Red Cross website.

***Practice! Do a drill of your communication plan to make sure everyone understands what to do. Go over the plan at least once per year and update contact information as needed.***