

Looking Back to Think Forward

RISK MANAGEMENT: EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS

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While the event was 25 years ago, I would tell you that it doesn't feel like it was that many years ago. As the leader of an early childhood program that was located six blocks directly north of the site, I was faced with a major man-made event—one for which I had no experience, formal education, or training. What was that event? The bombing of the Federal P. Murrah Building in downtown Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995. It was this day that the world watched as Oklahoma became the model for research on the trauma caused by mass violence, a community's healing, and lessons learned about emergency preparedness.

As the years have passed by, many other tragic events have taken place that have impacted young children in early childhood settings. The experience in Oklahoma taught our field that a written emergency and evacuation plan along with a system for practicing evacuation drills has become a must-have. In addition, programs must instill a sense of confidence as families leave their children at early childhood programs where they are well cared for and safe.

Risk management is the process of identifying, assessing, and controlling for threats to the well-being of an organization's stakeholders, reputation, or financial resources. These threats could stem from a wide variety of sources including man-made or natural disasters such as fire, storm, or earthquake. In addition, considerations can include accidental injury, acts of terrorism, child abuse and neglect, and, most recently, the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

There is no doubt that planning for emergencies and disasters can feel frightening. However, the development of a risk management plan—specific to the threats noted above—benefits you, staff, and the children and families served within your early childhood program. Most important, be prepared long before these issues occur! To do this your plans must include:

1. Meeting state licensing requirements related to emergency preparedness.
2. Providing clear policies and procedures within the employee and family handbooks.
3. Posting escape plans in conspicuous places within the program's facility.
4. Regular practice of the plan to ensure it is habitual in the event of an emergency.
5. Assignment of who will do what and a process to update this plan on a regular basis.

As we have learned most recently, the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) and [Child Care Aware® of America](#) continue to provide excellent resources for early childhood programs that have remained open to care for children of families who are essential workers. There are standards for handwashing and classroom sanitation including constant attention to cleaning frequently touched

surfaces. Directions are provided regarding what to do if a child or staff member becomes ill. Other concerns shared within the materials include social distancing strategies, staggered drop-off/pick up of children, use of face coverings, screening procedures upon arrival, and extra precaution considerations when feeding or holding a child.

Whether your program has remained open or will be re-opening in the near future, there are many details to consider. Continuous planning and communication with staff is a priority. Having clear policies and procedures in place before an emergency makes it much easier to spring into action.

Reach out to your fire, police, health, or local emergency response center. Make connections. Tell them about your program, where it is located, how many children are enrolled, and discuss your plans for an emergency or need for evacuation. Make the investment of your time to do the research—there are excellent resources available regarding emergency preparedness. You don't have to do it alone!

Want to learn more? As we are all experiencing uncertain times created by this pandemic, this is an excellent module choice! It is the lessons learned from early childhood educators who have shared their emergency response experiences that have resulted in many excellent resources and an important section within the [Aim4Excellence™ National Director Credential program, Module 4—Managing Program Operations](#). Whether it is one, two, or all of the modules, we invite you to access this professional development opportunity to enhance your knowledge as a program leader!

Here is a resource from Module 4 to assist with emergency evacuation planning:

EVACUATION PLAN CHECKLIST

- The plan incorporates state regulations.
- Policies and procedures are posted in the employee handbook.
- Policies and procedures are posted in the parent handbook.
- Escape plans are posted in prominent places within the facility.
- An off-site location is determined and traveling to this location is practiced regularly.
- Regular evacuation plans are reviewed and conducted based on event types (ex: fire, earthquake, intruder, weather, etc.).
- Each evacuation plan specifies who will do what.
- Determination of who will take emergency contact information for the children.
- Determination of how families will be contacted (ex: phone, text, email).
- Communication strategies between designated staff members and families.
- Determination of who will check that no child or staff member was left behind.