


PREPARING FOR DISASTER

WHAT EVERY EARLY CHILDHOOD DIRECTOR
NEEDS TO KNOW



Protect Children During Disasters
Reduce Risks to Children, Staff, and Your Program
Plan for Business Continuity
Communicate with Local Agencies
Conduct Staff Planning Sessions
Learn How to Shelter in Place and Evacuate Children Safely

CATHY GRACE AND ELIZABETH F. SHORES

THE DIRECTOR'S COMPANION TO **AFTER THE CRISIS**



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by Cathy Grace and Elizabeth F. Shores



DEDICATION

To the courageous individuals who lived through Hurricane Katrina with a determination to come back better than before; to the children and families who found comfort and strength in each other and have excelled in spite of trauma; and to those who came and stayed through the bad and the good so that the children of Katrina could laugh again.

and

To Charles Grace of Tupelo, Mississippi, and Buddy Johnson of Little Rock, Arkansas, for sticking with us through wind and high water.

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INTRODUCTION


This workbook reflects our experiences in the restoration of the early childhood sector in Mississippi following Hurricane Katrina in 2005. The shock we saw then in the faces and heard in the voices of early childhood program directors in Mississippi then were as close to the effects of war as we hope to witness. We hope this book will simplify the many important and difficult tasks of preparing for disaster so that early care and education providers can rebound from any disaster more easily.

Most early childhood programs in the United States are vulnerable to several kinds of disasters, although the degree of risk varies. Those universal threats include fires; severe storms; epidemics, hazardous material incidents, and other mass casualty incidents; and security threats. Programs may also be vulnerable to threats, including tornadoes, wildfires, hurricanes, earthquakes, and volcanoes that exist only in some geographic areas. Those local threats increase the vulnerability of individual programs, making disaster readiness even more urgent (Mississippi State University Early Childhood Institute, 2007).

The early childhood sector's vulnerability to disasters is a risk factor for young children (Shores, Heath, Barbaro, Barbaro, & Grace, 2008). Without a functioning network of early care and education, parents cannot return to work after a disaster, which prolongs the economic stress on families. Even worse, the loss of familiar child care settings is a profound aftershock for young children who have experienced a disaster firsthand or are witnessing its effects on their families. Without the predictable routine of going to an early childhood program, young children are more likely to suffer traumatic stress disorder. In addition, without a high-quality early childhood program, children with stress disorder are less likely to receive treatment and more likely to experience decades of lingering effects. Therefore, reopening existing early care and education programs after a crisis—at the same or higher levels of quality than before—is critical for the recovery of children, families, and entire communities (Shores, Grace, Barbaro, Flenner, & Barbaro, 2009).

The Rebuilding After Katrina Initiative to repair and re-equip licensed centers in southern Mississippi involved dozens of organizations and funding sources and triggered a new level of interagency collaboration in the state. It was an expensive, exhausting process that took years. Four years after Katrina, there were still few requirements or incentives across the country to prepare young children or the early childhood sector for disasters. We hope this can change. We hope that licensing, rating, and accrediting agencies will implement new standards for disaster readiness that will promote greater resilience for the sector, and thus for young children. However, it will still be the responsibility of individuals to prepare for disasters and reduce the risks.

This book is for the administrator of an early childhood program or family child care home who has decided to be proactive about potential disasters.



The first section describes tasks for the director or other senior administrator(s) to accomplish. The second section describes the responsibilities of staff members, particularly teachers. The third section contains worksheets and other forms that can simplify disaster readiness steps. The last section of the book offers guidelines for staff planning sessions so the staff directors can introduce key responsibilities to teachers and other employees and involve the staff in the ongoing task of disaster readiness. By incorporating all eight planning sessions into the staff meeting schedule each year, you will have a program of continuous professional development on this urgent topic.

The worksheets include the Disaster Readiness Master Plan, a three-page form that allows the director to schedule tasks and set priorities. We recommend that most of the disaster readiness activities be performed annually, but for an early care and education program that has not undertaken disaster readiness before, some tasks will require financial planning and more than a year to complete.

Disaster readiness is a serious responsibility. We commend the directors and staff members of child care centers and family child care homes who undertake the tasks in this workbook and wish you many years of clear skies and rewarding service to young children and their families.

DISASTER PREPAREDNESS: RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE DIRECTOR

1

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE DIRECTOR

As the director or administrator of an early childhood program, you are the best person to handle certain responsibilities of disaster readiness. If you have assistant administrators, you should be able to delegate some of these tasks including the important task of serving as director-designate if you are not able to perform your job during a disaster. These responsibilities fall into five categories:

1. Measures to protect children
2. Measures to reduce risk
3. Measures for business continuity
4. Communication
5. Staff planning sessions

In the rest of this section, we discuss these responsibilities for disaster readiness.

This workbook contains numerous worksheets and forms for individual planning activities (starting on page 75). Be sure to make copies of the worksheets and keep them in a special notebook. Make at least two back-up copies of the notebook, one to give to your substitute director and one to store in another location. The section “Measures for Business Continuity” (see page 15) addresses back-up storage of essential records. The three-page “Disaster Readiness Master Plan” (see pages 76–78) ranks the responsibilities of the director by:

- Priority 1: Identify disaster readiness contacts
- Priority 2: Review regulatory standards
- Priority 3: Perform basic readiness activities
- Priority 4: Perform advanced readiness activities
- Priority 5: Conduct staff planning sessions

Review this entire workbook before completing your Disaster Readiness Master Plan with target dates for individual activities in the plan. Of course, you may complete the tasks in a different order of priority, if you wish.

- ▶ **Use the Disaster Readiness Master Plan (see pages 76–78) to stay on schedule and follow through with all of the detailed tasks of true disaster readiness.**

MEASURES TO PROTECT CHILDREN

During sudden emergencies or disasters, you or your director-designate must account for your staff, move injured adults away from children if possible, and then help injured staff to protect the children inside your facility, evacuate them to a location outside the facility, or even evacuate them to a location some distance from the facility.

By identifying routes and destinations for sheltering in place or evacuation, you can prepare your staff and the children to move more quickly and safely during a crisis. Also, and this is very important, you will be able to advise families and your local emergency management agency *in advance* about where you plan to shelter or evacuate children.

SHELTERING IN PLACE

In some types of disasters, it is safer to keep the children and staff together inside the facility than to evacuate them to a different location. Select rooms or areas of your facility that are away from windows, doors, and exterior walls. If you are in a flood-risk area, select an additional area on the top floor of your facility. Areas with large flat roofs should be your last choice because flat roofs are particularly vulnerable.

- ▶ **Complete a Shelter-in-Place Diagram (see page 96) for each floor, wing, and building at your facility, showing the route to shelter-in-place locations and including one or more telephone numbers for search and rescue assistance. If your facility is small, your usual classrooms may have to serve as shelters.**
- ▶ **Use the Shelter-in-Place Checklist on page 95 to furnish each shelter location.**

BUILDING EVACUATION

Some types of emergencies, such as fires, flash floods, or earthquakes, call for evacuating children from the facility. Fire marshals in many states require early childhood programs to designate and mark exits for safe evacuation during fires. Your program can do even more to protect children by designating evacuation destinations where children can be sheltered until it is safe to return to the building or until families arrive.

Select areas outside your facility where you and the staff can gather children and remain out of the way of emergency vehicles. If you are in an earthquake area, choose places that are away from trees or buildings. Otherwise, select areas where children will be sheltered from wind, rain, and sun.

- ▶ **Complete a Building Evacuation Plan (see page 80) for each floor, wing, and building at your facility, showing the route to the evacuation location and including one or more telephone numbers for search and rescue assistance.**

TO DO



OFF-SITE RELOCATION

In an earthquake or other disaster involving localized danger, you may need to evacuate children and staff to a distant or off-site location. If your state and local emergency management agencies have not designated relocation sites for your program, you must find them yourself. If you can designate off-site relocation sites *before* a disaster, you can advise families during the annual orientation, in the family handbook, or by telephone as you evacuate.

Ideally, you should designate off-site relocation sites in two or more directions, in case one route or direction is unsafe. To designate off-site relocation sites, learn your community's general evacuation routes. Study an area map to choose evacuation routes along major roads, avoiding bridges and overpasses where possible. Next, search for specific locations that could shelter your staff and children until they can reunite with families. Perhaps you can establish reciprocal arrangements with early childhood programs in other communities, or ask a church, community center, or school to provide shelter. Identify these off-site relocation locations on the master plan (see page 94).

- ▶ **Use the Emergency Management Liaison Form on page 87 to formally request guidance on community evacuation routes and relocation sites.**
- ▶ **Identify relocation sites, either from emergency management agency (EMA) recommendations or through your own research. (Your community should have a municipal or county EMA. This agency is responsible for search and rescue operations after disasters.)**
- ▶ **Complete an Off-Site Relocation Plan (see page 94) for each relocation site you designate, copying one or more telephone numbers for search and rescue assistance on the plans. Inside the main box on the form, reproduce a clear map that shows the route and location for the relocation site.**

TO DO



MANDATORY CLOSINGS

You may be ordered to close your facility temporarily because of an approaching hurricane, wildfire, or flood. In a serious epidemic, your public health agency may order early childhood programs and schools to close for a period of time. The health department should have a plan for notifying your program, but it is important to follow news reports about mandatory closings. This is particularly true if you operate a license-exempt program, because the public health agency may not know of your program's existence.

To protect your program's investments and to maintain communication with staff and families during the time the program is closed, you should plan to move computers, key learning materials for each age group, and other hard-to-replace items to a safer location.

You may want to mention explicitly in your parent handbook that the program will continue to collect tuition during a mandatory closing.



TO DO

- **Use the Mandatory Closing Checklist on page 93 to plan which items you will move out of the facility and to double-check building security measures before vacating the facility.**

MEASURES TO REDUCE RISK

In the emergency management field, actions that may reduce the damage and losses from disasters are called **mitigation**. As the director or owner of an early childhood program, you may not be able to take the greatest possible mitigation step of moving your entire facility to a safer location. However, you may be able to make structural or non-structural modifications to the facility to reduce the damage if a disaster occurs (Federal Emergency Management Agency, 2006; Institute for Business and Home Safety, 1999; National Association of Child Care Resource and Referral Agencies, 2006; Oregon Natural Hazards Workgroup, 2003).

FACILITY MODIFICATIONS

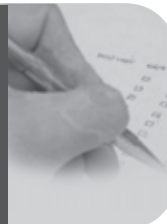
Many modifications to your facility can reduce the risk of injury or property damage in a fire, explosion, or other disaster. These changes may be expensive, and they may require outside funding. You can hire a qualified contractor to assess your facility's needs for structural modifications and provide an estimate of costs. With this information, you can decide whether the modifications are feasible or whether moving your program to another facility would be wise.

Your insurance carrier may be willing to reduce your premiums if you complete certain modifications. In this case, it could be financially worthwhile to borrow money to make the modifications, knowing you can repay the loan with the savings on insurance premiums. (See the section "Insurance.")

Your local EMA may be able to help you assess your facility or recommend qualified contractors.

- ▶ **Use the Facility Modifications Needs Assessment on pages 90–92 to assess your facility, to schedule any steps you can take, and to assess any properties your program may need to lease or purchase.**

TO DO



NON-STRUCTURAL MODIFICATIONS

You and your staff can take many steps to reduce the dangers during disasters, such as:

- ▶ Keeping a NOAA weather radio with tone alert and battery backup in a central location and continually on;
- ▶ Ensuring that evacuation kits are fully stocked and easily accessible; and
- ▶ Placing a pipe or crescent wrench next to each water and gas source.

- ▶ **Use the Child Safety Checklist (on page 82) to assess your facility and schedule the steps that staff members need to take. You can involve your staff in this assessment to make them aware of the importance of the modifications.**

TO DO



MEASURES FOR BUSINESS CONTINUITY

Disasters that cause severe structural damage to your facility or injure many employees could force you to temporarily close your program. An epidemic could lead to mandatory closing of your business for many weeks. Fortunately, you can take the following measures before a disaster to reopen your business as soon as possible.

RECORDS BACK-UP

Back-up storage of business and child records is crucial for business continuity and for supporting children and families in the aftermath of disasters. If your program already uses electronic records, you are a step ahead in disaster readiness. If your program uses paper records, it is wise to plan conversion to electronic records. We recommend that you include conversion to electronic records in the first year of your disaster readiness activities.

Administrative staff members are responsible for maintaining and preserving enrollment records (including emergency contact information) and other business records (including a complete, current copy of your master plan for disaster readiness). Teachers are responsible for the secure storage of child progress records so that in a disaster the records can be recovered. If your program's records are electronic, the specifications of your program's computer system will



- ▶ **Use the Essential Records Back-Up Worksheet on pages 88–89 to complete and implement a plan.**

INVENTORY

If you must file insurance claims after a disaster, you will need a current, accurate inventory of equipment, furnishings, and supplies, by classroom and with purchase price recorded. Complete an inventory of administrative and classroom equipment and furnishings each year.

INSURANCE

Several types of insurance can be important for repairing and reopening your facility after a disaster. Commercial property insurance and homeowner's insurance typically provide some coverage for repairing fire and wind damage. You may need separate policies for flood and earthquake damage (Insurance Information Institute, 2008).



- Complete the **Disaster Insurance Worksheet** on pages 85–86 as a record of the forms of insurance you already have or will purchase for your program.

RENTAL AGREEMENTS

If your program operates in a rented facility, use the next renewal of the rental agreement as an opportunity to ask the landlord to add specific terms about how quickly he or she will repair damages after a disaster.

DISASTER FUND

Even if your program is fully insured against disasters, having a disaster savings fund will help your business survive because insurance payments may be slow to arrive, or too low to cover all of your program's losses.

PREPARING FOR DISASTER

PREPARE YOUR EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM FOR DISASTER— BEFORE IT STRIKES.

Without warning, a catastrophic event can destroy an early childhood program. Based on Cathy Grace and Elizabeth Shores' experiences working in Mississippi after Hurricane Katrina, *Preparing for Disaster* explains the steps directors can take to insure the safety of their program and the children they care for.

With forms, worksheets, staff-training workshops, and task lists, as well as helpful guidelines and insights, this groundbreaking guide is filled with practical advice for every program director:

- Create a Disaster Readiness Master Plan—and implement it.
- Train teachers and administrators on how to react in a catastrophic event.
- Educate parents about your disaster plan to reduce panic.
- Learn to create planned evacuation routes and how to notify local emergency management agencies of your plans.
- Complete insurance, inventory, records back-up, and rental agreement forms.

Preparing for Disaster provides practical advice and information to prepare for and respond to universal disasters like fires and epidemics and regional disasters such as tornadoes and earthquakes. Protect your program before disaster strikes.

Preparing for Disaster is the companion book to *After the Crisis: Using Storybooks to Help Children Cope*.



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Cathy Grace, Ed.D., is the founding director of the Mississippi State University Early Childhood Institute and a professor of education. She led the development and implementation of an array of professional development interventions for early childhood programs in rural and under-served communities in Mississippi. Following Hurricane Katrina in 2005, she spearheaded a successful multimillion dollar effort to restore the early childhood sector in the disaster area.



Elizabeth F. Shores, M.A.P.H., has been an editor and policy analyst in the early childhood field since 1990, working for the Southern Early Childhood Association and as a contract researcher, writer, and editor for publishers and state and federal agencies. As the associate director for national initiatives of the Mississippi State University Early Childhood Institute, she helped restore the early childhood sector in the region affected by Hurricane Katrina and led projects to reduce the disaster vulnerability of early childhood programs nationwide.

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