

Emergency Preparedness Part 1: Creating a Child Care Emergency Preparedness Plan



DECAL
Thriving Child Care
Business Academy

Learn what an emergency preparedness plan is and how you can create your own

Having a well-thought-out emergency preparedness plan is paramount for the safety and security of your child care business in times of crisis. Georgia child care programs and providers are required to maintain Emergency Preparedness Plans. (See below for Emergency Preparedness Templates).

It's critical that your staff members know how to respond appropriately in case of emergencies, especially when you are unexpectedly unavailable. The good news is that creating an effective emergency preparedness plan doesn't have to be a complex process. This guide aims to underscore the importance of having a written emergency preparedness plan and will provide you with clear, step-by-step instructions to develop one tailored to your child care business.

What is an Emergency Preparedness Plan?

To understand why it is essential to capture your entire plan in writing and ensure everyone is on the same page, we'll take a quick look at what an emergency preparedness plan is and why it matters. An emergency preparedness plan is a series of documents created to ensure that your child care business will continue to operate as needed in the event of an emergency or disaster. These documents clearly outline the steps and procedures needed to minimize disruptions in care and prioritize the safety of children and staff in the event of an emergency.

Often during an emergency, people may feel overwhelmed. Having a well-written, thorough plan (that everyone knows about!) can help your employees feel confident in their actions. Most importantly it can ensure that you and your team are ready to provide support and ensure safety for children and families during stressful times.

How do I create an Emergency Preparedness Plan?

An emergency preparedness plan can take some time to develop, but it is important to complete. When creating a plan, set a realistic deadline for completion to keep yourself accountable. Also, consider having a small team of other staff members, if you have

them, and parents or caregivers who could help you as you write it to think through the best procedures.

A plan can be created using the following four steps:

Step 1: Assess Your Business for Areas of Risk

First, brainstorm through the types of potential natural disasters or emergency situations that could affect your child care operation. For example, is your business prone to certain natural disasters that would require an evacuation like floods or hurricanes? Do you live in an area that is at risk for extended loss of heating/AC, water, or power? Also consider the unexpected extended absence of management, a public health crisis, a security threat, or other unexpected situations.

Next, you want to determine how likely they are. You can create a simple table and have a probability of high, medium, and low. For each type of situation first write one line about how you would address it. Typically, there are two scenarios – staying put and getting out. For example, if you have concerns about a violent parent, you are likely going to stay put, lock the doors, and limit entry. In other situations, like a power outage, fire, or a flood you may want to get out of the building. Likely you will find that most, if not all, the scenarios will require one of these two responses. If they don't you can create new ones.

It is difficult to address every potential issue. At a minimum, you want to focus on the high probability risks. Additionally, you could cover medium and low probability ones using the same responses (such as stay put or get out).

Step 2: Create a Process for Emergencies

You will want to write down the steps to take in an emergency. The simpler you can make it, the better, so that way people can keep it clear in their heads during an emergency. Typically, it should start with sounding an alarm and end with verifying that all the children are where they should be (either in the building or at an evacuation point outside the building). If you can, having a flow chart can help.

As part of this process, clearly document both the on-site and off-site evacuation locations, as well as shelter-in-place locations. Remember to also document secondary routes to the evacuation locations in case primary routes are blocked. For your off-site evacuations, be sure you have thought out and included instructions on how children will be transported to off-site locations. Some questions to consider are:

- Do you need buses or vehicles?
- If you provide care for infants, how will you transport them or children with special needs?

In terms of your location, the plan should also include an emergency evacuation and relocation diagram with: a floor plan of your home or center, two exit paths from each

room, unless a room opens directly to the outdoors at ground level; the designated location outside of the child care home or center where all caregivers and children meet to ensure everyone has exited the building safely; plans for parent or caregiver pick up; and the designated location inside the building where all caregivers and children will take shelter.

You will want to make sure that your plan includes (and you follow up on getting) any needed supplies and a list of each child, their parent or guardian and contact information as well as any allergies, medications, or other special care needs. You should also have **phone numbers for all staff members, passwords for important online systems, contact information for property managers or landlords, a list of all approved repair companies, such as plumbers, electricians, pest control companies, and account numbers for financial institutions and utility services. The more sensitive information may be kept separately with limited access to staff.**

Designate at least one person on your team as the person in charge if you are not available. If you have staff, this could be an assistant director, administrative assistant, or trusted lead teacher. Choose someone who is willing and able to take charge in an emergency and make sure that person is trained on the protocols of how each situation should be handled if you are not present.

Keeping physical copies of the emergency preparedness plan (in addition to digital ones) allows for easier accessibility in instances where electronic access may not be possible. It also allows for the plan to travel with the person in charge should they need to move to another location. To create your binder, you should gather all your documents, in such a way that preserves their order and keeps pages safe. An easy way to do so is to invest in a 3-ring binder where you can use plastic sheet protectors for easy organization. Your binder should have designated sections for each component of your emergency preparedness plan (like chapters in a book). Creating a table of contents is a great idea and will help your employees find the sections they are looking for. It is recommended that you keep two printed copies of your emergency preparedness plan along with one saved on your computer and another at an off-site location (so, for example, if you have a home fire that destroys the print copies and your computer, you still have a copy). When creating your emergency preparedness plan, it is important to remember that it should be written in the language or languages needed so that anyone within your business can easily understand the actions to take either during an emergency or in your absence.

Step 3: Share the Plan

Sharing your plan with all staff members is very important. Even if an employee is not the designated person in charge, everyone should be very familiar with your emergency preparedness plan. It is recommended that you make the review of your emergency preparedness plan part of your onboarding process with all new staff and that employees review the plan at scheduled intervals, at least yearly. An easy way to do this

is to review the plan with everyone during a staff meeting. After review, each person should sign off that they have reviewed and understand the emergency preparedness plan. Make sure you provide time for staff members to ask questions or provide suggestions if they have them.

Communicating how emergencies will be handled with parents and families is essential. This information should be documented for families in your child care parent contract when a child enrolls. When reviewing with families, stress your notification plan to explain how you will communicate with them during and after emergencies and make them aware of all evacuation locations.

Step 4: Hold Drills and Revise Your Plan

It is important to practice evacuation and shelter-in-place drills on a regular basis.

- Follow state licensing and other applicable regulations for drill frequency and type. Programs and providers in Georgia must conduct and document monthly fire drills and tornado and lockdown drills every six months.
- Involve all children who are present at the time of the practice drill in the drill;
- Give children simple instructions and talk about what is happening; and
- Complete a drill log.

Emergency preparedness plans should be reviewed at least yearly for accuracy, and updated accordingly as staffing changes occur. It is a good idea to consult with emergency services when creating or making changes to the emergency portion of your plan, as they can provide valuable feedback and suggestions.

Next Steps

Having a written and well-organized emergency preparedness plan can make all the difference during emergencies. Protecting the children in your care, as well as your staff, is always your number one priority and your emergency preparedness plan will play an important role in ensuring their safety. While it may be hard to imagine a disaster striking and affecting your business, having an emergency preparedness plan in place will bring peace of mind to you, your staff, and your families. Once you have your plan developed, it is time to take the steps to implement it. For more on this topic, see [Emergency Preparedness Part 2: Being Ready for an Emergency](#).

[Emergency Preparedness Templates for CCLCs](#)

[Emergency Preparedness Templates for FCCLHs](#)

Additional Resources

If you have questions or need help, assistance is available.

[GaPDS Website](#)

[DECAL Thriving Child Care Business Academy Website](#)

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