



Planning for the Unexpected

Emergency Preparedness and Response Guide

for Children's Advocacy Centers

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Introduction

IN 2020, the world was overwhelmed by the COVID-19 pandemic, a global crisis unparalleled by any other in the lives of those impacted. Stay-at-home orders were issued, regular routines ground to a halt, and nothing was as it had been days before. In the same year, the United States was also struck with climate and weather disasters of historic proportions: the Atlantic hurricane season brought a record-breaking number of storms, the West saw a wildfire season worse than any in memory, and tornadoes blanketed the South.

The world stands on the precipice of an era of uncertainty, one where disruption and constant crisis impact every nonprofit and business on Earth. And we know in times of disaster that displacement and instability can increase risks to children and families, especially those most vulnerable.

All too frequently, we are provided stark reminders that emergencies created by humans can disrupt our lives, too. Mass shootings at schools and other acts of community violence have sadly become a predictable part of our experience. There are also news reports about other human-made disruptions, such as data breaches,

cyberattacks, workplace violence, criminal investigations into staff or leaders of an organization, and the list goes on. Disruptions can also include those of a less serious nature (such as road closures, internet outages, water pipe breaks, etc.), but these events can also impact service delivery to children and families.

This guide will provide some ideas for being prepared so your children's advocacy center (CAC) can shift to "Plan B" when necessary. Organizational resiliency—the ability of an organization to anticipate, prepare for, respond to, and adapt to incremental change and sudden disruptions in order to survive and prosper—is becoming essential in this age of disruption.

During an emergency, whether natural or human-made, the mission of a CAC is still critical to the well-being of the community. However, emergencies can disrupt business operations, making the ability to carry out the services of the CAC especially challenging. This is why preparedness matters—weathering storms, literally and figuratively, is consistent with the heart of the CAC mission: to restore hope, justice, and healing where they may have been lost.

How This Guide Was Created

CACS HAVE BEEN REQUIRED to weather all kinds of natural disasters—floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, wildfires, and more. In 2008, the Southern Regional Children's Advocacy Center (SRCAC) convened a panel of representatives from CACs across the Southern Region who had been impacted by disasters or who had a particular knowledge in disaster preparedness. This panel met in-person at a "Disaster Summit" to discuss what would need to be included in a manual that could serve as a template for CACs to establish their own disaster plans specific to their centers. The result was a guide entitled *Disaster Preparedness, Response and Recovery*, which provided a framework for developing a comprehensive plan to deal with the impact of natural disasters on CACs.

Plans for the *Disaster Preparedness Guide* have always been to expand it to include other types of emergencies and disruptions, including those created by humans. There was also the need to revise the guide to consider many factors that have changed in the intervening years and to incorporate the lessons learned in implementing emergency plans in the face of real-life situations. To accomplish comprehensive revisions, SRCAC sought participation from others, including CAC leaders, Victims of Child Abuse Act partners, and Chapters.

In 2021, SRCAC hosted a series of virtual meetings with focus groups representing many of these organizations. The focus groups heard from experienced and knowledgeable CAC leaders whose facilities and staff have been impacted by hurricanes, wildfires, flooding, and more. CAC and Chapter leaders also explained how severe the impacts can be from internal events outside of a natural disaster, such as the abrupt departure of a director or other administrators, an action by a staff member or team partner that creates conflict or impacts the appearance of integrity, or the disruption from a cyberattack or data breach.

The focus group discussion also turned to the role neighboring CACs, Chapters, Regional CACs, and the NCA could play in the preparation, response, and recovery phases. They survived the severe damage to their facilities, buildings, and grounds; widespread destruction of property and infrastructure in the community; disruption of evacuating people, equipment, and operations; and the hardship and anguish of the loss and damage to their own homes. However, many are continuing to deal with far-reaching and long-lasting disaster consequences. Their input and practical suggestions are at the core of this revised guide entitled, "A Guide for Preparing Your Children's Advocacy Center for the Unexpected."

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Unique Challenges for CACs and the Clients They Serve

Unique Challenges for Families After a Disaster or Emergency

CACS WORK WITH THE MOST VULNERABLE MEMBERS OF A COMMUNITY. The dynamics that accompany disasters or emergencies can lead to additional stress and hardship for individuals, leaving children even more at risk for victimization. Children can be left alone due to shortages in childcare. They can also become more isolated, at times leaving them alone with a perpetrator for long periods of time and without outside contact or support. In the first two months of stay-at-home orders during the COVID-19 pandemic, more than half of all calls to the RAINN (Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network) hotline were made by minors, for the first time in the organization's 25-year history. Among those children who called, 79% said they were living with the person sexually abusing them, and 67% said that person was a family member.¹

Anecdotally, participants in the SRCAC focus groups, along with CACs and Chapters from around the country, reported increased severity of child abuse cases during the pandemic.² Members of the focus groups also shared additional challenges brought about during natural disasters:

- Itinerant workers came in to aid in recovery, so there was a need for new or additional translation services.
- The types of abuse reports shifted, and CACs and multidisciplinary teams (MDTs) had to respond (e.g., alleged abuse in temporary shelters).

- Partner agencies brought in outside help, so there were new and/or previously unknown members of the MDT who were not aware of the protocol or existing team structures or relationships.

Finally, disasters and emergencies often magnify or intensify long-standing race and class inequities. Marginalized and under-resourced families have fewer resources to recover, leaving the individuals—and especially the children—more at risk.

Unique Challenges for CACs After a Disaster or Emergency

DISASTERS AND EMERGENCIES IMPACT CACS in short- and long-term ways. From something as simple as travel time being lengthened (a 20-minute commute can become 3 hours), to the loss of landmarks, the simplest of tasks can become daunting. It is harder to find families because so many have become displaced. CACs also must reckon with many competing priorities, from re-booting business operations to making sure staff are okay, and to caring for families in new and different ways. In the long term, other things can change for the CAC. For example, donors or board members may move out of the community after a natural disaster, or staff may face the permanent loss of a home. Donations get re-routed to disaster or emergency response efforts and decline for CACs. CACs need help, and Chapters and Regional CACs can be a resource.

1. Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network. (2020, April 16). *For the first time ever, minors make up half of visitors to National Sexual Assault Hotline* [Press release]. <https://www.rainn.org/news/first-time-ever-minors-make-half-visitors-national-sexual-assault-hotline>

2. Southern Regional Children's Advocacy Center. (2020–2021) Technical assistance logs. Unpublished internal company document.

How to Use This Guide

WHILE OTHER ORGANIZATIONS, like the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), are truly experts in disaster recovery and emergency response, this guide is intended to provide unique context for CACs and Chapters. The guide is structured with major components: preparation and response. The first component (Section 1) is structured with a step-by-step process to help you develop your CAC's Emergency Preparedness Plan:

- **Step 1:** Laying the Groundwork
- **Step 2:** Assessing Current Vulnerabilities and Preparedness
- **Step 3:** Writing Your Emergency Preparedness Plan

To make these steps more accessible, "Quick Tips" have been added to the beginning of each step. The Quick Tips are a summary of the main objectives within that particular step. While completing the full checklists within each of the steps will ensure your preparation is robust, the

Quick Tips help provide a high-level view of what to consider as you work toward preparedness and allow you to jump directly to a section for guidance.

The second component (Sections 2-5) is focused on response for CACs, broken down by emergency type. Please note, in most of the text we refer to CACs directly. While some guidance regarding direct service impact may not apply to Chapters specifically, there are many components that can be used as a helpful guide for Chapters to create their own Emergency Preparedness Plan. Furthermore, in Section 5, we'll highlight the ways Chapters and other helpers can aid CACs in responding to crises brought about by disasters, disruptions, and emergencies.

It is possible your CAC or Chapter developed an Emergency Preparedness Plan using the previous guide. The revised guide can be used to review and refresh your plan. This guide has expanded the scope to include additional kinds of disasters and emergency situations, including technological disruptions and mass violence.



Section 1:

Steps to Develop an Emergency Preparedness Plan

Step 1: Laying the Groundwork

QUICK TIPS

1. Engage Senior Leadership and/or Board of Directors
2. Identify and Establish Preparedness Team
3. Cultivate Community Partnerships
4. Identify Highest Priority Risks for Assessment
5. Determine the CAC's Essential Functions to Safeguard

Engage Senior Leadership and/or Board of Directors

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS IS A CRITICAL FUNCTION for any organization during this age of uncertainty. Before embarking on this journey, you will want to obtain buy-in from key leaders at your organization for the investment of time and resources to develop a comprehensive plan. If your CAC is a nonprofit, your board of directors should consider emergency preparedness as a part of its core responsibility of risk mitigation. If your CAC is government-based, your Emergency Preparedness Plan will likely be created in coordination with the agency with which you are affiliated. If you are part of a large umbrella organization, you likely will want to identify the areas of emergency preparedness your umbrella organization is responsible for and the areas that are specific to the CAC. The best Emergency Preparedness Plans are created with buy-in from and in consultation with key leadership (staff and board).



Because of our prior experience living through a disaster, we were in a good spot for the next one that came. We had adapted to working in a mobile manner and secured our networks to be able to work anywhere. We have been able to be more adaptable and to think about things that we hadn't thought about before."

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

Identify and Establish Your Preparedness Team

TEAMWORK IS AT THE CORE of the CAC model, and the process of developing your plan should not be any different. Even if you have limited staff and resources, teamwork makes developing a plan accessible. Because of the multidisciplinary nature of CAC work, you will likely need to partner both internally and externally to develop a thorough, relevant plan. That said, the core team should include key leaders who are on staff at the CAC and be someone with the authority to implement changes to policies and/or procedures (e.g., a board member for a stand-alone nonprofit, an agency executive with appropriate authority for a government-based CAC, etc.).

You likely will also want to identify individuals to consult regarding various topics. For example, you may want to consider consulting with your clinical supervisor to discuss specific services, an IT expert on your board to explore risks, partner agencies to consider various service provision scenarios, etc.

However, no matter how big your preparedness team, someone needs to take ownership of the plan to ensure it not only gets created, but that it is implemented, maintained, and updated. This individual will actively work with all organizations and people involved in the implementation of the plan.

Cultivate Community Partnerships

THE IMPORTANCE of having strong relationships with partners in your community and from around your state can be valuable in the lead-up to and aftermath of a natural disaster or other significant disruption. These partners can provide direct services provision, office space, equipment, etc. Cultivate these relationships prior to an emergency so when you need assistance, the relationship and what that partner can provide is clear and ready to go. Consider ways to not only get help when you need it, but to assist in communitywide emergency planning and response.

Specifically:

- Reach out to neighboring CACs, multidisciplinary team partner agencies, your Chapter, and Regional CAC in advance of an emergency. Is there a role they can all play in planning, responding, and recovering?
- Connect with local emergency management agencies, other

nonprofit agencies, and volunteer agencies. Expand your network in the community.

- Ensure your CAC has reviewed the opportunity to sign the [memorandum of understanding \(MOU\) with the Federal Bureau for Investigation \(FBI\)](#) and cultivated a relationship with the FBI in your jurisdiction(s).

TIP: Facilities close to hospitals are most likely to have power restored quickly. In addition, you may want to consider an in-community resource, as well as a neighboring community resource in the event your entire community is impacted.



When law enforcement, CPS workers, medical, emergency responders and the court systems are shut down because people are displaced and have nowhere to live, it really makes it difficult to do what you need to do for your children.”

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

Identify the Highest Priority Risks for Assessment

RISK IS INDIVIDUALIZED, so your CAC should work with its preparedness team to identify the highest risks specific to your location. By identifying, assessing, and prioritizing possible risks and vulnerabilities common to your region, you are able to mitigate and minimize the impact of disasters and

emergencies. In turn, identifying risks, when coupled with planning and long-term strategies, can reduce loss of life and property, as well as lessen the physiological impacts and trauma.³ Some examples of risks to consider are:

- **Natural disasters:**
 - ◆ Flood
 - ◆ Hurricane
 - ◆ Tornado
 - ◆ Wildfire
 - ◆ Avalanche/snow/winter storm
 - ◆ Volcano
 - ◆ Earthquake
 - ◆ Tsunami
 - ◆ Pandemic
- **Human-made emergencies:**
 - ◆ Nearby chemical plants
 - ◆ Nearby nuclear plants
 - ◆ Under-maintained infrastructure (e.g., levees, dams)
 - ◆ Underprepared power supply
 - ◆ Mass shootings
 - ◆ Community violence
- **Critical incidents**
 - ◆ Embezzlement
 - ◆ Client record breach

Determine the CAC's Essential Functions to Safeguard

It is likely during a disaster or emergency that some CAC operations will need to be suspended. However, there are essential functions (EFs) that need to be protected. EFs are those needed to carry out the mission and business operations

of the CAC. In some of the disasters and emergencies addressed in this guide, your facility may not be impacted. Even so, you should consider circumstances that could impact delivery of services, including staff shortage, damage to community infrastructure affecting travel, cyberattacks, or internet disruptions. Those commonly fall in two categories:

- Services to clients (e.g., conducting forensic interviews, advocacy, safety of staff and clients, transportation)
- Business operations (e.g., payroll, communication infrastructure, location of operations and client records)

You can plan for what operations are deemed most essential, but the disaster, emergency, or disruption may redefine “essential.” Some CACs have shared they suspended forensic interviews following a natural disaster to focus on advocacy for clients. As situations evolved, re-starting forensic interviews became necessary. Identifying EFs in advance will ensure your plan is tailored toward sustaining the most critical functions of the CAC. Retaining flexibility after a disaster or emergency will ensure your CAC is responsive to the particular situation.

Here is a sample EF table from an editable template provided by Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) you can use as a framework when identifying your EFs and the activities that are required to support those functions.

3. <https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/risk-management/hazard-mitigation-planning>

Table 1: SAMPLE Essential Function Table

Essential Function	Recovery Time Objective	Responsible Personnel
[Insert organizational essential function here]	[List max time to resume function.]	[List staff and managers responsible for essential function.]
	Resources	
	[Insert required equipment, supplies, records, etc.]	
	Work Location & Space Requirements	
	[Insert continuity facility or telework location, IT, and communications access needs.]	
	Supporting Activities	
	[Insert essential supporting activities.]	
	Interdependencies	
	[Insert other entities who provide required work or resources. Include mutual aid agreements where applicable.]	
	Expected Costs	
[Insert the costs associated with the implementation of the essential function.]		

Table from “Continuity Plan Template and Instructions for Non-Federal Entities and Community-Based Organizations,” FEMA, <https://www.fema.gov/emergency-managers/national-preparedness/continuity/toolkit/brochures>, accessed May 2022.

Note: Repeat this table for each essential function.

A Note on Mental Health Services

The [National Children’s Alliance National Standards for Accreditation for Children’s Advocacy Centers](#) requires CACs to provide evidence-based, trauma-focused mental health services. While there are several models that meet this requirement, some are designed for longer-term treatment. It likely will not be practical (or advised) to provide long-term trauma treatment in the immediate aftermath of a disaster or emergency. However, there are shorter duration treatments, such as [Child and Family Traumatic Stress Intervention \(CFTSI\)](#), that are more appropriate, as they focus on reduction of symptoms and can serve as a seamless bridge to longer term mental health treatment when necessary.

Equipping your providers with training in models like CFTSI will better position them to assist in the immediate aftermath of a disaster or emergency.



The first services to come back online were focused on basic needs—food, clothing, shelter. Our advocacy services were happening immediately.”

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

Step 2: Assessing Current Vulnerabilities and Preparedness

QUICK TIPS

1. The Difference between Core Preparedness and Risk Preparedness
 2. Assess Your Risk by Functional Area
 3. Summarize Your Findings
-

The Difference between Core Preparedness and Risk Preparedness

CORE PREPAREDNESS denotes a practice that is applicable to any CAC, no matter its specific risks. These are, in general, sound risk management practices and are broadly applicable. Risk preparedness denotes practices or mitigation strategies specific to your risks. For example, if you are in an area subject to high winds, the proximity of trees to your building should be a consideration. The best plans include both core readiness and risk preparedness.

In general, core business preparedness is consistent with nonprofit management best practices. The National Children's Alliance [National Standards for Accreditation for Children's Advocacy Centers](#) includes many of these core preparedness practices, and

the companion guide, [Putting Standards into Practice](#), gives additional context and implementation guidance. Pay particular attention to the Organizational Capacity Standard and use an approach that does not just “check the box,” but rather embraces the spirit of the standard and engages your board and leadership in implementation consistent with your CAC's structure and size. Essential Component C of the Organizational Capacity Standard requires safety and security policies and procedures, including emergency response policies.

Assess Your Risk Preparedness by Functional Area

THIS STEP IS ABOUT ASSESSMENT. By examining your CAC as it is now—your facilities, infrastructure, operations, and relationships—you will start to understand your strengths and areas for improvement as they relate to being prepared for a potential disaster or emergency. You will likely find many areas that could use strengthening; do not let that overwhelm you. Through partnership, you will work to identify the highest risk vulnerabilities at your CAC as a starting place.

Facilities Management

- Hire a contractor, inspector, or other professional who can help you identify your facility's vulnerabilities. Police, firefighters, or building inspectors may also be able to help. Ask them to point out any structural issues that could be a problem with wind or water, help identify the safest room and driest room, and advise on other issues they notice.
- Explore mitigation factors relevant to your individualized vulnerabilities. Some examples might include installing a generator, keeping tarps on hand to cover a damaged roof, installing tile or linoleum in flood-prone zones, pruning trees and shrubbery around buildings, etc.
- Review your insurance policy to be sure it maintains adequate coverage. A helpful exercise is to imagine every potential scenario, natural or human-made, that could impact your CAC, then go over those scenarios with your insurance broker to ensure adequate coverage. Be sure to ask about cybersecurity insurance. Also, ask for advice on what records, photographs, and inventory would be helpful when/if you file a claim.
- Seek professional advice on adding security features, such as metal detectors, security cameras, and other measures to limit access to private offices, interview rooms, and other areas.



Having someone skilled at looking at your insurance policies and the ability to assess your agency's risk before disaster happens is invaluable. We would have been in a lot of trouble if we didn't have the correct insurance coverage on our property."

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

Information Technology Infrastructure/Cybersecurity

- Evaluate agency policies regarding the handling of portable media and equipment, such as laptops, flash drives, CDs, DVDs, etc. Include policies for disposal of laptops.
- Evaluate policies for reporting lost data, such as laptop or other media.
- Evaluate the security of your information technology (IT) systems and seek individuals with expertise to ensure your data is fully secured against cyberattacks and data breaches.
- Evaluate the security, back-up frequency, and cloud-based storage of files and vital business documents. Vital business documents may include, but are not limited to:
 - Financial statements
 - Payroll
 - Insurance policies
 - 501(c)(3) documentation, if applicable
 - Board records
 - Personnel records
 - Audits
 - Employee manuals
 - Articles of incorporation
 - Interagency agreements
 - Contracts and grants information
 - Donor lists and records
- Assess your current practices around training staff and volunteers on data security, how to recognize cyberattacks, appropriate office email practice, and proper file-sharing methods. Evaluate personnel policies for electronic communications, social media usage, and measures to be taken when an employee resigns or is terminated. Ensure terminated employees do not have access to internal systems, communications platforms, social media, etc.



Having a strong communication policy is critical. We underestimate how important it is to train staff on writing a correct email. [...] It has to be a rotating reminder for staff. These emails can harm the reputation of the agency.”

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

Business Operations

- Evaluate the handling and storage of confidential client information and records, including securing forensic interview recordings in a manner that will maintain the chain of evidence. Ensure the CAC has a records retention policy that is regularly maintained.
- Evaluate Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) regulations and policies/procedures for maintaining protected health information.
- Evaluate insurance deductibles and cash reserves. If reserves are not adequate to cover deductibles, develop a plan to increase reserves to adequate amounts to prepare for emergencies.
- Designate an alternate staff member(s) who has access to online banking and can authorize payments.
- Evaluate financial policies to ensure they are up-to-date and adequate for your organizational structure. Ensure donation acceptance policies are in place.
- Ensure findings from your annual independent audit have been addressed.

Human Resources

- Evaluate personnel/human resources (HR) policies annually.
- Evaluate payroll and employee leave-time policies to be effective in an emergency.
- Evaluate alternative and/or staggered work schedule practices and agency policies for remote work. Include clear expectations for the handling of confidential materials and records.
- It may be possible to deliver some direct services in the client's home. Evaluate written guidelines and expectations for this possibility. Note: It is not recommended that any direct client services be delivered from the employee's home.
- Evaluate your office's ability to generate and distribute payroll if the disruption is widespread and ongoing.
- Evaluate policies for aid if your staff experiences hardships. Consider your policies for cash advances, loans, leave time, returning to work after a disaster or emergency, reimbursement for work-related expenses, and other issues.



We discussed with our board setting up a fund for the staff who chose not to evacuate. Most staff didn't leave because they couldn't afford to."

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

Media and Communications

- Evaluate the status of relationships with local media outlets; maintain a list of media contacts.
- Designate one or more staff members who are authorized to speak to the media on behalf of the organization. Be sure all employees understand that they must direct any media inquiries to the designated staff for comments.
- Draft a statement of autonomy explaining that CACs are locally controlled in case your staff is asked to comment on an incident at a sister CAC.
- Ensure a method of monitoring social media and other media outlets so that you are aware of what is being said about your organization. Set up Google Alerts for your organization.



Working with the media in advance is key. The media is looking for ways to inform the public during crisis. Anything that the CAC movement can give them that has that kind of story attached, they will be interested."

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT



Community Resources and Partnerships

- Reach out to your sister CACs, Chapters, and Regional CAC offices in advance of an emergency. Is there a role that they can all play in planning, responding, and recovering?
- Connect with local emergency management agencies, other nonprofit agencies, and volunteer agencies. Expand your network in the community. Consider ways to not only get help when you need it, but to assist in community-wide disaster and emergency planning and response.
- Evaluate/update volunteer management policies.

Summarize Your Findings

AFTER COMPLETING THIS CHECKLIST, create a prioritized list of items that need attention or improvement. Share this list with the board of directors or governing authority over your CAC and make any adjustments. From there, develop a work plan to begin enhancing your ability to be more resilient in the face of a disaster, emergency, or disruption.

Step 3: Writing Your Emergency Preparedness Plan



What surprised me was the flood of donations to the CAC and the potential for embezzlement or misuse by staff who were also in need.”

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

QUICK TIPS

1. Convene the Team to Create Your Plan
2. Create a Written Emergency Preparedness Plan
3. Implement and Maintain Your Emergency Preparedness Plan

Convene the Team to Create Your Plan

THE PRECEDING STEP was focused on *assessment of vulnerabilities*, and this step is focused on *concrete written planning* for disasters, emergencies, and disruptions. After assessing your risk and readiness, it's time to begin writing your Emergency Preparedness Plan. The information below is intended to be used to prepare for an emergency, natural, or human-made disaster or emergency that displaces

the operations of the CAC. The team you convene in this step may be the same as previous sections, but you may also find you need to identify additional resources as you work through these steps.

Create a Written Emergency Preparedness Plan

UTILIZING THE SAME FOCUS AREAS as in your assessment phase, this checklist provides concrete steps by functional area to write your plan.

Facilities Management

- Identify and prepare “safe rooms” in your facility that employees can use in case of an emergency. Practice evacuating to these rooms. If there are not safe areas in your building, plan for building modifications, such as door locks. Be sure employees understand their responsibilities to help clients and families move to the safe rooms in an emergency.
 - Think of emergency repair tools and other supplies that may be needed immediately after the disaster or emergency and consider having those on site. Examples might include chainsaws, shovels, duct tape, etc.
 - Create a safety and first aid kit and inspect all emergency equipment such as fire extinguishers, Automatic External Defibrillators (AEDs), smoke and carbon monoxide detectors on a regular basis. Make sure employees know how to access and use these items.
 - Create a building site map and provide a copy of this to the local fire department and emergency management agency. Post the map in various locations in the building, including evacuation routes.
 - Consider safe ways to mitigate damage to your building in an emergency, such as how to turn off the water to your building and/or locate the circuit breaker panel. Ensure key staff are aware of the location and operation of this equipment.
 - Develop a relationship with a sister CAC or other agency. Consider the possibility of moving equipment and records to that facility, using it as an alternate meeting place for staff, and/or if the sister agency could provide services to your clients until you are able to resume operation. Facilities close to hospitals are most likely to have power restored quickly. In addition, you may want to consider an in-community resource, as well as a neighboring community resource, in the event that your entire community is impacted.
 - When evacuation is necessary, make plans to secure the building and assign team members to re-enter the building when it is safe to do so.
 - Ask your insurance broker for advice on what records, photographs, and inventory would be helpful when/if you file a claim. Keep an updated inventory and clearly label all equipment. Assign someone the task of updating the inventory regularly. Be sure to capture any equipment that may be off-site.
 - Ensure findings from annual independent audit have been addressed.
-

Information Technology Infrastructure/Cybersecurity

- Plan for alternate means of communication if cell phone service is disrupted. Consider having multiple cell phone service providers in case one is impacted and another is not.
- Identify the equipment, files, and other resources your staff needs to work remotely.
- Create a backup plan for evidence collection and medical records in the case of displacement.
- Create a plan for working remotely, including access to email, data, and any intranet communications and the ability to update your website.
- Create and communicate an alternate plan for accessing information and for communications in case of service failure (phone, Internet, power). Ask an IT expert to advise on what issues to consider and plan for in case of an emergency.

Business Operations

- Maintain a cloud-based list of staff phone numbers, emergency contacts, and anticipated location in the event of a displacement.
- Determine who will have access to information and files in an emergency, such as the emergency contact list for staff, banking information, including passwords, insurance policies, passwords and administrative privileges for your IT systems, contacts for utility providers, etc. There are many online services specifically designed for storing this type of information, and they can guide you with a thorough approach.
- Have a plan to assess any lost information, and for restoring data from back-ups and/or for recreating and updating data.
- Have cash reserves and plan for extra expenses. Follow your financial policies for all the aforementioned scenarios to safeguard your organization.

Human Resources

- Develop a list of core agency contact information, including staff, MDT, and board information.
- Identify essential staff and team leaders and establish clearly defined roles in the event of an emergency. Always have alternate staff members and administrators assigned to step in if necessary.
- Develop a plan to generate and distribute payroll if the disruption is widespread and ongoing.
- If you do not have your staff, you cannot achieve your mission. Encourage employees to develop an Emergency Preparedness Plan for their own families and put together their own personal safety kit. Provide a list of helpful websites such as: www.ready.gov, www.fema.gov, and the [Harbor app](#).

Media and Communications

- Designate a spokesperson who will communicate with the media. Remember to identify an alternate spokesperson as well.
- Emphasize to staff to not respond to questions about the event or post information on their social media sites. Ensure that they know to refer any questions to the designated spokesperson.

Implement and Maintain Your Emergency Preparedness Plan

ONCE YOUR PLAN IS CREATED, it should be formally reviewed and adopted by the governing body of your CAC (e.g., board of directors, agency head, etc.). As with any plan, it should be regularly revisited and revised. **It is recommended that you revisit and practice the plan at least once a year.** However, you may also identify certain drills or procedures that should be practiced on a regular schedule. Create a plan to implement those practices. Below is an example schedule that would repeat annually:

- **July – August:** Review and revise your Emergency Preparedness Plan
- **September:** Annual staff orientation on Emergency Preparedness Plan and safety procedures
- **October:** Fire/emergency evacuation drill
- **November:** Tornado drill
- **January:** Lockdown drill
- **March:** Tornado drill
- **May:** Fire/emergency evacuation drill
- **June:** Lockdown drill

A man with dark curly hair and a beard, wearing a light blue button-down shirt and a watch, is seated at a table. He is holding a pair of black-rimmed glasses in his right hand and gesturing with his left hand as if in the middle of a conversation. He is looking towards the right side of the frame. In the foreground, the back of a woman's head with long dark hair is visible on the left, and the back of a man's head with short brown hair is visible on the right. The background is a bright, modern office space with a large window and a green plant.

Section 2:

Response Immediately Before, During, and After an Emergency or Natural Disaster

While your Emergency Preparedness Plan should be an exercise in all-hazard planning, the response will depend on the nature of the disaster or emergency. For some events, you may have a few days to prepare; for others, your response must be instantaneous. In every situation, the safety and well-being of your staff and your clients and families should be prioritized.

Emergency Weather Event/ Natural Disaster

IN THE DAYS AND/OR HOURS leading up to a weather event/natural disaster, consider the following:

- Determine if staff and clients need to move to identified safe rooms.
 - Decide whether you are going to release staff early. If so, communicate the release plans clearly as soon as the decision is made.
 - Contact clients to inform them of any change in operating plans, if possible.
 - Advise your staff to implement their own personal Emergency Preparedness Plan.
 - Activate the emergency call roster/text message plan for staff.
 - Provide constant updates and communication as possible.
 - Remind your staff of the designated meeting place/alternate location or sister organization if communication following the event is impossible.
 - Advise your staff to take what they need for remote working and remind them of the policies for doing so.
 - Communicate with neighboring CACs, Chapters, and/or Regional CACs to keep them informed of your needs.
- Implement the plan for client notification and communication.
 - Implement the plan to notify stakeholders, the board of directors, and MDT partners, and any other stakeholders that emergency procedures are in effect.
 - Determine whether a press release or other media communication is necessary.
 - Obtain emergency cash and make sure designated team members have copies of all necessary banking, insurance, IT, employee, client management, and other information.
 - Implement IT backups and offsite storage plan.
 - Secure all client records, files, evidence, etc., prior to leaving the facility, if possible, to protect confidentiality and preserve the chain of evidence.
 - Post contact information on the door of your facility.
 - Secure your facility and evacuate, as necessary.
 - Ideally, someone from the leadership team should evacuate to a safe location to be able to access the Internet, receive texts, etc. Another member of the leadership team needs to stay in the local community.

Public Health Emergencies

DURING A PUBLIC HEALTH EMERGENCY, consider the following:

- Establish a designee for monitoring public health guidance.
 - Follow Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines (e.g., implement masking and social distancing policies, and post notices).
 - Determine if staggered/alternating work schedules are necessary for staff in your office and/or implement working from home policies and procedures.
- Develop a comprehensive communications plan for key constituents (e.g., clients, staff, board, community partners, funders, MDT members).
 - Contact client families regarding changes and/or alternative plans.
 - Develop communication plan with MDT partners to include: alternate client plans, access to files, records, evidence, etc.
 - Maintain clear and updated guidance on hours and access to services, keeping voicemails, websites, and other communications up to date.



Section 3:

Response During or After a Critical Incident

Critical incidents, such as embezzlement, a data breach, or an arrest of a staff member, require a different response than natural disasters. As stated earlier in the guide, core business preparedness is consistent with nonprofit management best practices, which will help an agency mitigate against the potential for critical incidents. However, even the strongest organizations still can face unexpected events. Below is a list of suggested items to help you respond to critical incidents at your CAC or in your state.



Communicate as frequently with as much clarity as possible. People need to rebuild their trust in the organization, and you, as a leader, can help them begin that rebuilding.”

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

Critical Incidents

AFTER A CRITICAL INCIDENT, consider the following actions:

- Assess the situation with your preparedness team, including your designated spokesperson and/or media liaison. Involve a trusted source from outside your agency to help view the situation from another perspective, if appropriate and helpful.
- Assess the level of impact and decide who should be contacted. Consider your board chairperson, legal advisor, key staff, MDT partners, your Chapter director, the NCA, and/or your Regional CAC office.
- Be proactive. Notify staff and the board before information is made public in the media.
- Communicate with staff regularly and clearly. Understand that information may need to be repeated multiple times. If there is no updated news to share, communicate that, as well. Over-communicate rather than under-communicate. Remember, individuals learn differently, so it may be helpful to communicate orally and in a written format. Re-focus on the CAC's mission to keep staff positively focused and engaged.
- Do not answer on behalf of another agency. Refer questions to the appropriate agency.
- Work closely with your media liaison/designated spokesperson in preparing your message, anticipating questions, preparing for interviews, and/or press conferences.
- Remember, NCA requires notification from its members of certain critical incidents. See [NCA's Critical Incident Reporting Policy](#) for more information. (To access the policy, log in to NCA Engage or create a free login.)
- Determine whether a public response is in the best interest of the CAC. Consider what information should/should not be disclosed. If necessary, seek legal advice. Be as transparent as you can

legally be, and proactively get out in front of the news, if possible. Make sure you have made decisive action before engaging with the press.

- Think carefully about your message to the public and consider the scope of your reach, including staff, your executive director, clients, volunteers, MDT partners, funders, and your community. Be consistent, clear, and concise. Always redirect to your mission in statements.
- Review and edit any prepared statements and/or press releases.
- Inform your staff to refer any questions or requests for comments to the designated spokesperson. Provide a short statement to be used by your employees to refer any questions to the proper spokesperson. Avoid the use of the phrase “no comment.”
- Be sure everyone, including board members, partners, volunteers, etc. understand the process of referring the media to the designated spokesperson. Remind everyone of the social media

policies and caution them to refrain from posting anything on social media related to the incident.

- Assure and reassure your client families that you will continue to provide services.
- Be as transparent as possible. Give your key staff specific instructions as to what can/cannot be shared, both inside and outside your organization.
- When appropriate, reach out to your local media contact.
- Monitor social media and online news platforms.
- Keep detailed documentation and clear records for yourself. However, be aware that under certain conditions records may be subject to subpoena.

On the following page is a worksheet that you and your team can use to map out your internal and external communications plan prior to experiencing a critical incident. The worksheet isn't comprehensive but highlights important actions to consider during and after a critical incident.

Critical Incident Response Plan

Intended to be a quick reference guide / Customize for your CAC

Internal Communications		External Communications	
HUMAN RESOURCES <small>Staff, Board, MDT, Clients Partners and Funders</small>	ACTION TAKEN	MEDIA	ACTION TAKEN
Critically assess the current situation and begin to develop a strategy for recovery. Who needs to be informed of the situation immediately?		Before responding to an incident in the media stop and think! Is a response required? Does it benefit the agency?	
Decide who needs to be at the table to deal with the crisis. 1. 2. 3.		Compose a written media statement, giving precise information without speculation. Practice your statement.	
Before communicating with anyone, write out what you intend to say. Create bullet points that will be easy to follow. This will ensure your message is consistent. If needed, consult with legal counsel about what can and cannot be made public.		Anticipate what questions may be asked and formulate written responses.	
Debrief the situation with key staff. Give them specific instruction about what can be shared with other employees. Consider providing bullet points so there is not confusion on what can be shared.	Key staff: Contacted:	When responding to questions in an interview: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Answer with “just the facts.” · Do not give your personal opinion – it is irrelevant. · Do not assume anything is “off the record.” · Avoid “no comment.” Instead frame a statement such as, “We are not able to respond at this time because of an ongoing investigation.” 	
Designate a public spokesperson who will be the voice for the agency. This person should have the following skill set: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Knowledge of the CAC and current situation · Good public-speaking skills · Understanding of how to refer questions to appropriate people · Media training 	Designated spokesperson: Contacted:	Do not answer on behalf of another agency. Refer questions to those agencies.	
Transparency is important. As much as possible, have open communication with staff, partners and donors. Be up front with people about the fact that there may be information you are not at liberty to share.		Communicate to the media that you have a responsibility to protect your clients and to provide a child-focused environment. Ask for their cooperation in continuing to do this.	
Be sure that everyone, staff, board members, MDT partners, etc. know the process for referring media requests to the designated spokesperson.			

Internal Communications		External Communications	
HUMAN RESOURCES Staff, Board, MDT, Clients Partners and Funders	ACTION TAKEN	MEDIA	ACTION TAKEN
Contact funders and apprise them of the situation. Address any concerns or needs they might have.	Funders to contact: 1. 2. 3.		
Depending on the incident, other agencies might enter the picture. Establish a working relationship with these agencies and make sure you are at the table and in the conversations. Understand their role and how you can assist them.	Other agencies that might be involved: 1. 2. 3.		
Have an “open door” policy so that staff can share their concerns.			
Assess the need for debriefing and/or crisis counseling for staff. Identify who the staff can be referred to or who is appropriate to come in and debrief the staff.	Possible people to help with counseling or debriefing: 1. 2. 3.		
Share with your staff and board words of support and encouragement received from other agencies.			
Get input from staff about what they see as challenges and what they need to move past the event.			
At the appropriate time, communicate to the staff that the agency will move forward. Do not stay mired in the crisis.			
Refocus staff on their job – not on past crisis.			
Provide opportunities for teambuilding among the staff.			
Keep reiterating the mission of the agency to the staff. Be sure that everyone is still bought in to the mission.			
Anticipate a long healing process for the staff. Depending on the situation, it could take a couple of years to get past an incident.			
Let your Chapter and Regional CAC know what your status is. They can be great resources and sources of support.			
The National Children’s Alliance requires its members to report certain critical incidents involving local member CACs. Determine if this incident requires reporting.			

A close-up photograph of a woman with dark, curly hair hugging a person with long, light-colored braids. The woman's eyes are closed and she has a gentle smile, suggesting a moment of comfort and support. The background is a soft, out-of-focus outdoor setting.

Section 4:

Response During or After Mass Violence

While no community wishes to experience mass violence that impacts children, CACs can play a critical role in the community-based response to these situations. Because of a CAC's unique experience with helping children who have experienced trauma (including as witnesses to violence), CACs may be called upon to assist in forensic interviewing, advocacy, and mental health supports for children and their families. There are special considerations for provision of each of these services given the unique nature of the situation.

In general, CACs should stay within working protocols as they relate to service eligibility and service provision to reduce risk and ensure adherence to the CAC model, funding contracts, and statutory parameters. Thought should also be given to how a CAC will ensure that pre-existing clients (prior to or not related to the mass casualty), as well as those clients who are the victims of the mass casualty incident, will be served. CACs may not have the capacity to treat these clients, as not all communities have the same resources at their disposal. Below is additional guidance for service provision.

Forensic Interviews

- Given state statutes and/or rules governing the duplication, discovery, and/or release of forensic interviews, consider whether the interview recordings will be protected from public release.
- If the Federal Bureau for Investigation (FBI) is involved, as is often the case in mass violence incidents, ensure the CAC is operating within the [established protocol with the FBI](#).
- Ensure coordination with members of the MDT as usual, which may be more complicated or unclear given the chaotic nature of the immediate response, jurisdictional issues, the pace of the situation, etc.

Family Advocacy

- There is often a need for advocacy services following an incident of mass violence. If the CAC is asked to play a role, ensure there are adequate resources to provide the service. This will likely need to be reassessed as the situation develops over days and weeks.
- Consider other resources the CAC may have to aid in the situation (e.g., therapy dogs).

Mental Health Treatment

- Typically, a pre-determined entity will coordinate the mental health response (many times through a federal government effort). CACs should have a "seat at the table" but will not typically coordinate the response.

- A triage approach is recommended by experts in the field of mass casualty response *and* must be coordinated with formal systems, as these systems typically have a pre-planned mental health response to mass casualty events. Urgent needs may be:
 - ♦ Disseminating resources to the community (e.g., psychoeducation materials)
 - ♦ Screening referred children for trauma symptoms using standardized, validated trauma assessments
 - ♦ If accessible, referrals to brief, early, evidence-based, trauma-focused treatment (such as Child and Family Traumatic Stress Intervention)
 - ♦ Referrals to longer-term treatment (e.g., Trauma Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy or Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing)
- Immediate crisis response should focus on reducing symptoms, not recounting the trauma, which can only increase symptoms. Crisis response should also prioritize caregivers, providing them with the tools needed to develop concrete strategies to address traumatic symptoms (for themselves and their children). Processing trauma (i.e., trauma narrative work) is not recommended until after the acute phase.
- CACs also may have the opportunity to provide long-term mental health support in impacted communities when many of the triage services are gone, considering that CACs are often a primary provider of trauma-focused child mental health services in many communities.



Section 5:

The Role of Helpers:

What Chapters and Regional CACs
Can Do to Assist CACs During a
Disaster or Emergency



We thought we were prepared, we thought we knew what we were going to go through, but here we are 10 months later with people still out of their homes, still trying to put their lives back together.”

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The storm hit on a Wednesday, school was out for four weeks, all daycares were destroyed [...] that impacted a lot of our staff. All the things kids had for an outlet were gone. All the things we would do for self-care to help us get through a traumatic event were taken away.”

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

Managing the response after a disaster or emergency is a round-the-clock job, and CACs should not feel alone at this unpredictable and chaotic time. When capacity permits, the Chapter can play an important role in assisting CACs in their response and recovery after a disaster or emergency.

What the National Children's Alliance Does to Help CACs

THE NATIONAL CHILDREN'S ALLIANCE (NCA) IS ANOTHER IMPORTANT RESOURCE

available to provide support for its member CACs and Chapters. Through its national network of more than a thousand agencies, NCA can amplify the voice of CACs and their communities in times of significant need. In disasters or crises, NCA supports its members with public relations strategy, coordinates requests for assistance to the national movement, and liaises with federal agencies, such as the FBI, in instances of mass violence. NCA can also be called on to assist with preparing CACs and Chapters

for media coverage, navigating crisis communication, and briefing Congress on CAC needs related to crises and disasters.

What Can Chapters and Regional CACs Do in the Short Term for CACs?

Below is a list of ways to help a CAC during the acute phase of a disaster or emergency:

- Call and check in. Let the CAC know you care and are there for them. This simple act was, for many in the focus group who had direct experience living through a disaster or emergency, one of the most profound, moving, and memorable parts of their recovery.

- Consider who the primary point of contact at the Chapter will be for the CAC. Discuss preferred communication methods (e.g., text before calling, setting up an established time to check in daily).
 - Think about how you can assist with their basic needs. The CACs may be focusing on needs in the community, but they are going through a tremendous trauma themselves. If a restaurant is still open, consider providing food for the staff. Offer to help with simple tasks to lighten their load. Help them by thinking in advance of what you can offer.
 - Offer to liaise with funders and communicate about potential delays in grant reporting, shifts in services, etc. Encourage CACs not to make rash decisions (like laying off employees) until the CAC and/or Chapter are able to understand how the grantor will proceed. Explore flexible options for continuing funding and reimbursements.
 - Explore funding opportunities to support the immediate and long-term needs of the CAC in the community.
 - Offer to liaise with other essential community partners, as necessary. For example, the Chapter may be best situated to liaise with statewide MDT partners, state agencies, or the Governor's Office.
 - Given the level of visibility of the disaster or emergency on a national level, it is possible the CAC will be overwhelmed by communications and offers for help. See if the Chapter can play a role (like monitoring an email inbox and prioritizing messages) that alleviates the communications burden.
- Resources in their community may be limited, so consider bringing in critical resources from outside the community (e.g., burner phones, mobile hot spots).
 - Activate a network of helpers. Let other CACs in the state know how best to communicate (phone, email) with the CAC in need, and make sure they are reaching out to offer support using preferred communication methods. All members of the focus group impacted by disasters or emergencies agreed—having their peers calling to let them know they cared had a lasting, profound impact.
 - If the disaster or emergency has impacted multiple CACs, coordinate opportunities to communicate across impacted centers to share resources, support, and ideas.
 - If an alternate space is needed, offer to help them think through whether a sister CAC or partner agency could provide a temporary office or assist with services. Activate resources, like mobile units, that may be available in other places in the state.
 - Be proactive in helping the CACs craft messages about what donations they need. Individuals want to help, and if there is an easy way to give, they will be more likely to do so.
 - ♦ Send donation lists to other CACs in the country so they can be a part of helping. Amazon Wish Lists, gift cards, or other easily accessible online wish lists make shopping simple for donors.
 - ♦ Ensure shipping is arranged either to the CAC or an alternate location

(e.g., the Chapter office) if mail has been suspended in the CAC's area.

- ◆ Donation designations should be clear and can be updated on an e-appeal or website. Is the appeal for families? CAC staff? MDT professionals? Cash donations are difficult to track and not advised.
- ◆ If the Chapter is serving in a collection or dissemination role, all policies and procedures should be documented and shared with the board of directors of both the Chapter and the local CAC. Remember, if the disaster or emergency is ongoing, usual fundraising events may be interrupted or postponed, so consider this in your planning.
- Many CACs shift their services to basic advocacy after a disaster or emergency. Chapters can help normalize this shift to meeting concrete needs.



The relationship with your funders is critical. You need to touch base with them immediately before and immediately after the disaster, if you can.”

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

What Can Chapters and Regional CACs Do in the Long Term for CACs?

- After the acute phase of a disaster or emergency, the media moves on and public interest wanes. Be sure the CACs know you're still aware of their recovery and are available for long-term support.
- CAC staff may have experienced the disaster or emergency as a personal trauma, in addition to the secondary traumatic stress they experience in their jobs. Help CAC leadership think through ways to support their team's emotional recovery for the long-haul.
- If FEMA is present to help in recovery, the CAC may need external help to complete paperwork. There are experts who can help, but there are also increases in fraud during natural disasters. Offer to help the CAC identify reputable providers.
- If the emergency is related to mass violence or terrorism, the [U.S. Department of Justice, Office for Victims of Crime](#) offers assistance in grant-writing.
- Help CACs think through roles they can play in the community regarding risks to children. Can they help community leaders understand the impact on children? Can they help community leaders develop simple, resiliency-building activities for children?
- Help CACs determine if they are eligible for any additional federal grants or funds.

Case Study: The Chapter Role in Natural Disaster Resiliency

The 2020 storm season was the most active in Louisiana recorded history, with three hurricanes and two tropical storms striking the state. The storms impacted numerous CACs across Louisiana and, in some cases, devastated CAC communities. After that experience, the Louisiana Chapter (Louisiana Alliance of Children's Advocacy Centers, or LACAC) identified the need for a more formal, systemic response to natural disasters for CACs. LACAC recognized that every CAC was different and had varied abilities to develop and implement emergency preparedness plans, so they developed a comprehensive initiative to benefit CACs regardless of capacity.

At a glance:

Challenges

- Disaster response fatigue
- Needs varied from community to community
- Limited funds following the disaster

Outcomes

- CACs felt more supported and confident
- Creative new ways to think about disruption were generated
- Access to tangible resources

Steps:

1. A web-based rapid needs assessment tool was developed and implemented to gauge the level of community-by-community impact of individual storms during the hurricane season. Follow-up phone calls were conducted for deeper assessment of impacted communities.
2. LACAC conducted individual conversations with each CAC to learn about their current emergency preparedness plans and needs.
3. A consultant trained CACs in emergency preparedness and resiliency. Each center was offered one-on-one consulting to go through a templated planning process.
4. Creative strategies were developed for a flexible response, utilizing resources available at neighboring centers for a regional response model.



It's easy to start small. It can be as simple as conversations in your office about emergency plans to normalize this way of thinking. Responding is a dynamic process; do not get set on a specific way of doing something. Be flexible."

FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

Other Resources

American Red Cross

<http://www.redcross.org/prepare>

National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (Responder and Community Resilience)

Disaster Worker Resiliency Training Participant Manual,
https://tools.niehs.nih.gov/wetp/public/hasl_get_blob.cfm?ID=10382

National Mass Violence Victimization Resource Center (NMVVR)

<https://www.nmvvr.org>

“Providing Long-Term Services after Major Disasters”

Free download from the Urban Institute 2007

<https://www.urban.org/research/publication/providing-long-term-services-after-major-disasters>

Ready (a website from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security)

<http://ready.gov>



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