

General Child Safety

Guidance for Emergency Evacuation Shelters & Local Assistance Centers



Save the Children®

Domestic Emergencies Unit

Save the Children has learned that simple, low-cost and no-cost improvements to the design and location of emergency evacuation shelters, local assistance centers and other locations where children and families congregate before, during and after incidents can dramatically improve the safety and well-being of children and adults who utilize them. Although these sites are intended to be temporary, addressing and improving residents' quality of life is important. Below are best practices that address children's unique needs and promote child safety and well-being while in temporary locations.

Evacuation and Sheltering

- To the greatest extent possible, keep families, neighborhoods and communities together. Supporting existing social networks contributes to safety, particularly for children.

Shelter Dormitory Design

- Designate a clearly delineated physical area where children can play and interact with other children. It is required that the space be supervised by two or more trained, background-checked adults. Ensure that children of all abilities can use the space. Refer to Save the Children's "Child-Friendly Spaces Program" for detailed guidance on setting up and maintaining children's areas.
- When the area for children is located in the dormitory area, surround the designated area for children by a family sleeping area, then by single women, then single men and others with more extensive needs.
- To minimize the risk to young children and infants, who may be sleep walkers and/or at risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, provide age-appropriate sleeping items such as portable cribs.

Hygiene and Bathroom Safety

- Women and girls should receive appropriate resources and support for menstruation and nursing. It is important that these materials are appropriate, discreet, and that women are involved in making decisions about what is provided to them.
- Designate a bathroom for children and families close in proximity to the space where children play and to the family sleeping area.
- Provide separate well-lit restroom facilities based on gender, for safety and security of users.
- Designate staff and/or law enforcement officials to monitor each bathroom. Bathrooms are dangerous places for children, especially those with multiple stalls and shower facilities.
- Designate shower/bathing facilities with times for child bathing and family use and appropriate monitoring by shelter staff/security
- Provide a clean, private area where women can breast feed young infants. Encourage breastfeeding and have a lactation consultant on site when possible.
- Provide sterile materials to support newborn and young child health, such as baby basins.
- Make essential materials available for young children such as diapers (various sizes), pull-ups and wipes. Include an environmentally sound system for their disposal. Involve mothers in making decisions about what is needed and provided.
- Make available age-appropriate, nutritious food for infants, toddlers and young children.

Facility Layout and Safety

- Designate bathrooms for family use only. Ensure that these facilities are adjacent to the family designated sleeping area and children's area, are well lit and have a monitor (staff or security personnel) at all times.
- Designate reunification areas within the shelter and facilitate family reunification as needed.
- Provide lighting that allows residents to walk safely at night outside the building. When amenities such as bathrooms, laundry facilities, showers and/or other resources are located outside ensure there is proper lighting and security during all times of day and night.
- In the event that portable bathrooms are positioned outside, ensure they are as close enough to the family designated sleeping area as regulations permit. Again, ensure there is proper lighting and security during all times of day and night.
- Be attentive to resident and vehicle traffic patterns and take pre-cautionary steps to separate the areas where children congregate from daily traffic activities. Establish and enforce normal traffic regulations (stop signs, posted speed limits, bus stops, etc.)
- Monitor unused areas within the building to reduce the opportunity for illegal behavior and violence.
- Identify and report potential safety hazards for children such as electrical outlets, stairs, or exits.
- Be sure to clearly mark multiple emergency exits.
- Identify green spaces (outdoor areas) for children to play and, where possible, allow access to playground and out-door play materials.
- Identify community gathering areas where residents can congregate, interact, contribute to each other's sense of hope and lessen isolation amongst other residents as they cope with the demands of rebuilding their lives in their communities.

Additional Best Practices

- Count all children and infants upon registration. Document their ages and physical, emotional or cognitive needs they may have.
- Provide clear reunification protocols for unaccompanied or separated children to facilitate family reunification.
- Ensure minimum standards for food, water, health, hygiene and access to medical care are met.
- Provide children with the opportunity to resume normal activities, such as school and child care, as soon as possible.
- Work to ensure appropriate transportation to get children from the evacuation shelter site to activities, such as child care, schools, after school programs, or camps.
- Arrange for children to participate in out-of-school activities such as after school programs and/or camp activities.
- When using air conditioning, control the room temperature. Infants lose body heat more easily than adults and can not produce enough body heat by shivering.
- Provide pregnant women and new mothers with pre/post natal care and related services.
- Create systems to ensure that single parents receive the support necessary to ensure the health and hygiene of their children
- Establish a community meeting forum where residents can receive updates, identify and resolve issues, and share essential recovery information.