National Center for Disaster Preparedness
EARTH INSTITUTE | COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

Best Practices Checklist for
Community-Wide Emergency Management Agencies

Intro: The goal of this document is to offer best practices for improving disaster preparedness and child protection in communities by using suggestions and resources to achieve strengthened community resilience. This checklist was created by cross-walking action items with questions from the Community Preparedness Index (CPI) from the National Center for Disaster Preparedness and Save the Children. The best practices and resources presented in this document are not the only way to help address gaps in the CPI assessment (if the CPI was administered), and some suggestions may be constrained by local or state regulations or laws. The best practices listed in this checklist can help guide discussions and plans of which organizations should take on the responsibility of improving child-focused preparedness and protection in communities. One type of organization that is referred to throughout the best practices is the "lead organization." A lead organization is responsible for safeguarding the community to be more prepared for emergencies and create policy, guidance, and technical assistance to help with preparedness and planning efforts. A designated lead organization implies an organization, such as a government agency or non-profit, has a mission and the capacity to directly improve a specific element of preparedness. A de facto lead organization fills the same role as a lead organization but is not specifically accountable for the element of preparedness.

Intended Audience: The Community-Wide sector can be best described as the agency or organization which is responsible for the coordination and management of all aspects of child-focused planning and preparedness. This agency is most likely the local Emergency Management Office or Agency at the county and/or city level. The best practices presented in this document are primarily targeted to decision and policy makers and in particular, emergency managers. These best practices provide suggestions about what has worked for other localities and states and what is desired for an effective response. This document aims to improve child-focused planning and resilience, which is not always explicitly planned for by emergency management agencies. Local planning, preparedness, or recovery coalitions are encouraged to provide this information to stakeholders to understand how plans can be improved.

Approach to Action: There are 3 major ways to achieving the best practices detailed below.
1. State Regulation
2. County or local regulations
3. Best practices through coalitions

As you review the best practices and check off items, keep in mind that legal requirements and actions with a lead organization carry more weight in terms of preparedness than a practice. However, best practices, which may not be formally codified, are still valuable.

Before You Get Started: Before going through these best practices, identify state, county, and local regulations for community-wide emergency management policies, procedures, and

guidelines. These may include local (e.g., city, village, etc.), county, or state level requirements. There may be some conflicts between these plans, but also some opportunities for alignment.

Disclaimer: The question identifiers that begin with "Q" (e.g.: Q1, Q2, etc.) located next to some of the checklist items correspond to the question number in the Community Preparedness Index (CPI) questionnaire. This reference point is for those who are utilizing this tool alongside the CPI. The item numbers are to track individual items within this document only. For more information about the CPI please email rcrc@columbia.edu. This document was last updated on **8/6/2021.** The referenced hyperlinks will not be maintained beyond this date but are listed for your reference.

Elements of Preparedness

☐ (1) **Included a position identified as "lead coordinator for children's needs" (or equivalent terminology) within the incident command structure for the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) for a citywide and countywide level disaster (i.e., the EOC with the direct link to the Governor's office and State EOC).** *(Q. 1)*
A "Lead coordinator for children's needs" ensures the needs of children are considered when establishing an Emergency Operations Center (EOC). An example of how this can be integrated at the federal level is included in the references.[1] This should also be integrated at the state and local levels if it is not already. A dedicated liaison in the EOC can advocate for the unique needs of children at the various states of response and recovery. Additionally, they can coordinate resources specifically for children and across the various sectors in which they are in.

☐ (2) **Established a real-time tracking system for the status of all child-serving facilities that may have children sheltering in place or evacuated, and integrated this system into the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) for a citywide and countywide level disaster (i.e., the EOC with the direct link to the Governor's office and State EOC), including the following types of child-serving facilities:** *(Q. 2)*
☐ **Family Child Care Homes**
In this type of child care arrangement, providers care for small groups of children in a residential building—a single or multi-family home, apartment, or condo unit. Depending on the rules in each state, family child care providers may or may not be required to be licensed. Normally, the agency responsible for their location is the County or local licensing agency, such as the Department of Office of Child and Family Services (or regional equivalent) or Child Care Resource and Referral agency (CCR&R).

☐ **Child Care Centers**

Child care centers are usually located in commercial buildings and are larger and care for more children than family child care providers. All states have regulations for licensed centers, but not all child care centers are licensed. Normally, the agency responsible for their location is the County or local licensing agency or Child Care Resource and Referral agency (CCR&R).

☐ **Public Schools**

Public schools are schools supported by public funds. Normally, the entities responsible for their location are local school district offices. Charter schools, should also be integrated into community emergency planning. Charter schools are typically publicly funded but privately run and are subject to many of the same regulations as public schools.

☐ **Private Schools**

Private schools are schools which are not supported financially by public funds. The entities responsible for their location are independent schools.

☐ **Juvenile Justice Residential Facilities**

These facilities are in charge of safely detaining youth while providing them with academic programs, vocational training, and medical treatment. They can be run by states, local governments, or private companies. The agencies responsible for their location include, but are not limited to, Department of Human Services, Department of Justice[2], among others.

☐ **Foster Care Guardians**

Foster care, or out-of-home placement, is a system in which a minor has been placed into a ward, group home or private home of a state-certified caregiver, also referred to as foster care guardians. The agencies responsible for their location are the Department of Social Services and private placement agencies.

☐ **Emergency Shelters**

Emergency shelters provide temporary emergency relief to disaster victims, involving a range of emergency human services like food, shelter, health care and family reunification. The entities responsible for their location are normally local Emergency Management Agencies.

Each responsible agency or organization for the above listed sectors may have their own tracking system or protocol. Efforts should be made to integrate these tracking systems into the state and local EOC or create a new system if it does not exist already. Real-time situational awareness of the location of children enables the EOC plan for and allocate resources accordingly and coordinate with local law enforcement if required. The location-based information should consider child health needs, particularly medical, behavioral health, and social vulnerabilities which might require specially trained individuals as first responders. An example of a school safety planning and response tool can be found in the references.[3]

☐ **(4)** **Within the prior 3 years, units of government reporting to the local executive officer (mayor and/or county executive, as applicable) have performed and obtained the following needs assessments:** *(Q. 4)*

☐ **State, regional and local pediatric surge capacity**

Pediatric surge is defined as an influx of pediatric patients which may overwhelm local capacity to treat the unique needs of children. This may include and influx to an existing system or efflux to a neighboring system. Receiving facilities should have specially trained staff to treat children, along with the necessary pediatric-specific medical equipment. These resources are often found specialized pediatric specialty centers and should include EMS in the planning process. Key elements in planning for pediatric surge include security and safety of children. [4]

☐ **Pediatric Basic Life Support equipment needs**

Pediatric Basic Life Support may include the use of CPR and cardiac defibrillation when an Automated External Defibrillator (AED) is present. [5]

☐ **Pediatric Advanced Life Support equipment needs**

Pediatric Advanced Life Support equipment may include laryngoscope, endotracheal, meconium aspirator adaptor, and more.[6]

☐ **(5)** **Established a statewide or regional system that includes your community and that designates hospitals certified to offer various kinds of pediatric care during emergencies.** *(Q. 5)*

Regional pediatric disaster coalitions[7] are an excellent resource for regional organization for pediatric surge and planning resources. Regional hospital systems may also have their own plans in place and should be integrated into Public Health and Medical Services (ESF#8) plans.

☐ **(6)** **Established a regional planning/working group to develop a formal, regional system of pediatric care for disasters.** *(Q. 6)*

This working group should include public health and medical experts from federal, state, and local health agencies, and child experts with experience in disaster preparedness and response.[8]

☐ **(7)** **Ensured the entire jurisdiction is covered by an existing hazard mitigation plan.** *(Q.7)*

See references for the official guide for local governments to develop, update and implement local mitigation plans.[9] Hazard mitigation plans provide in-depth analysis of the types of hazards which may affect children in any given area of a jurisdiction. Threat Response Guides can be developed accordingly. Each state and county are required to develop and maintain a Hazard Mitigation plan which are publicly available.

☐ **(8)** **Established a hazard mitigation plan that designates specific priority projects that involve strengthening structures that may house children during emergencies and/or providing safety features to minimize injury and death during emergencies.** *(Q. 8)*

At the community level, Hazard Mitigation planning is a process for state, county, city, and local governments or special districts to identify community-level policies and actions that will reduce the impacts of hazards. Normally these are updated every 5 years. To access your local jurisdiction's hazard mitigation plan, contact your local emergency management agency. See in references a natural hazards index map of the United States to identify your local jurisdiction's hazard index.[10] Also in references, tools for child care providers to reduce exposure to pollutants in facilities.[11]

☐ **(9)** **The following activities, services, and programs to help families prepare for disasters that occur when children are at home, are available in your community:** *(Q. 9)*

☐ **Web-based home preparedness campaigns by the local health department, emergency management agency, or police department/law enforcement agency**

☐ **Public service announcements on television**

☐ **Public service announcements on social media websites**

☐ **Public school curricula about home emergency preparedness**

See references for a list of programs, and alerts and warnings citizens may receive.[12] Consider proactive outreach across all child-serving sectors for enrollment into reverse 911 programs or early warning systems. Also see in references for specific resources on how child serving organizations can better prepare for emergencies, as well as to include children in disaster preparedness across the community. [13] [14] [15]

Established a formal or informal agreement with a designated lead or de facto organization for policy, go-to guidance, and technical assistance that helps communities with:

☐ **(10)** **Providing disaster and recovery case management services.** *(Q.10a)*

Provisioning of case management services for disaster response and recovery can be coordinated through Emergency Management and funded through FEMA Individual Assistance after a disaster. Child care providers should work directly with their local Emergency Management Agency to identify case management partners.

☐ **Lead Organization Name:** _____

☐ **(11)** **Protecting children from exploitation during emergencies.** *(Q.10b)*

Protecting children from exploitation refers to preventing and responding to violence, abuse, exploitation, and neglect of children during emergency situations. The lead organization should have a mission that directly applies to protecting children during emergencies. Coordinate with agencies including the National

Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)[16], local law enforcement, and appropriate state and local social service agencies.
☐ **Lead Organization Name:** _____

☐ (12) **Providing "temporary respite care" *.** *(Q.10c)*
Some examples of respite opportunities are child activity centers and Safe Spaces or Kid-Friendly Spaces. If these are used as true respite care, rather than a guardian oversight, it implies that these are child care centers and should be run as such (i.e., the same protocols as child care centers should be applied for screening volunteers, etc.). Respite care for parents can guardians allows for a time of play for children and also for parents to have the flexibility to address urgent issues associated with displacement. Respite care is defined at the end of the document.
☐ **Lead Organization Name:** _____

☐ (13) **Tracking the location of children who have been forced to evacuate and/or been separated from their parents/guardians.** *(Q.10d)*
Coordinate with agencies including the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), local law enforcement, and appropriate state and local social service agencies. The movement and location of children in a community is ideally coordinated through the Emergency Operations Center.
☐ **Lead Organization Name:** _____

☐ (14) **Family reunification.** *(Q.10e)*
Family reunification refers to the process of ensuring children return to the care of their parent(s)/guardians as quickly as possible after an emergency. Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Red Cross or the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, along with local law enforcement and emergency management organizations can provide guidance and resources for planning ahead of emergencies. [17] [18] Family reunification plans may be enacted during shelter openings, evacuations, or other no-notice emergencies.
☐ **Lead Organization Name:** _____

☐ (15) **Emergency medical services for children who are sheltering in place or who have evacuated.** *(Q.10f)*
Examples of organizations that can provide guidance or technical support include local pediatric preparedness coalitions.[7] Consult with local Emergency Medical Serivces and public health agency to coordinate services.
☐ **Lead Organization Name:** _____

☐ (16) **Emergency medical services for children who need transportation to hospitals and other treatment facilities.** *(Q.10g)*
Coordinate with local ambulance services and hospitals to establish agreements and protocols. May also include other non-medical transportation resources such as public bus services. Special emphasis should be made on maintaining background checks on drivers, and also including special training and accommodations for children with disabilities, access, or functional needs.
☐ **Lead Organization Name:** _____

☐ **(17) Utilization of/coordination with National Emergency Child Locator Center.** *(Q.10h)*
The National Emergency Child Locator Center [16] is operated by the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) and activated during Presidentially declared disasters. Its mission is to help locate displaced children and reunite them with their families. In February 2007, FEMA signed an MOU with the NCMEC, the American Red Cross, the U.S. Department of Justice, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to enhance information-sharing concerning people displaced by disasters. Coordinate with NCMEC, local law enforcement, and appropriate state and local social service agencies.
☐ **Lead Organization Name:** _____

☐ **(18) Crisis period communications with child-serving facilities, families of children with sensory and cognitive disabilities, and families with limited English proficiency.** *(Q.10i)*
Crisis communications are often coordinated through local Health Departments and offices within Social Services. Efforts should be made to coordinate with local privately run partners who specialize in serving these populations. Trusted messengers who are well equipped to transmit emergency messaging should be identified pre-disaster.
☐ **Lead Organization Name:** _____

Relevant Definitions:

*"Temporary respite care": "Providing short-term care for children in disaster recovery centers, assistance center, shelter, or other service delivery site while the guardians are onsite." - Administration for Children and Families

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[1] Homeland Security for Children Act – This bill requires the Department of Homeland Security to review and incorporate feedback from organizations representing the needs of children into disaster preparedness and recovery policies.
https://www.congress.gov/bill/116th-congress/house-bill/2932

[2] Department of Justice - This document from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a guide for juvenile justice residential facilities in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from emergencies.
https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/library/publications/emergency-planning-juvenile-justice-residential-facilities

[3] State Emergency Response Application (SERA) – North Carolina Department of Public Safety (NCDPS) - The State Emergency Response Application is a secure web-based application available to first responders and law enforcement officers that provides critical information about school facilities. It can be used for planning and training purposes, and can be quickly accessed from mobile devices in the field when it is needed for an emergency response.
https://www.ncdps.gov/sera

[4] American Academy of Pediatrics – Guidance on planning for and responding to a hospital pediatric surge.
https://www.aap.org/en-us/Documents/PediatricSurgePlanningWebinarSlidesJune252018.pdf

[5] Advanced Medical Certification – A handbook for providing Basic Life Support (BLS) and Pediatric Advanced Life Support (PALS) to children and infants.
https://advancedmedicalcertification.com/lesson/bls-for-pediatrics-pals-online-handboook/

[6] Missouri Department of Health & Senior Services – A checklist of equipment and supplies required for Pediatric Advanced Life Support (PALS).
https://health.mo.gov/safety/ems/pdf/ChecklistforPediatricEquipment.pdf

[7] National Pediatric Disaster Coalition – A list of regional pediatric disaster coalitions, which can be an excellent resource for regional organization for pediatric surge and planning resources.
https://www.npdcoalition.org/our-members/

[8] National Advisory Committee on Children and Disasters – A report from the NACCD's Healthcare Preparedness Working Group, which examines the roles of coalition-building, workforce development, and medical countermeasure readiness in disaster preparedness. A summary of recommendations for coalitions is found on page 7, and pages 13-21.
https://www.phe.gov/Preparedness/legal/boards/naccd/Documents/healthcare-prep-wg-20151311.pdf

[9] Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) – FEMA'S official guide for local governments to develop, update and implement local mitigation plans. This Local Mitigation Planning Handbook analyzes the types of hazards which may affect children in any given area of a jurisdiction.
https://www.fema.gov/sites/default/files/2020-06/fema-local-mitigation-planning-handbook_03-2013.pdf

[10] National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP), Columbia University - US Natural Hazards Index - This beta version of the US Natural Hazards Index help visualize historical and projected data for numerous natural hazards. The index was created to provide communities and public health officials with an overview of the risks that are prominent in their county, and to facilitate the comparison of hazard level between counties.
https://ncdp.columbia.edu/library/mapsmapping-projects/us-natural-hazards-index/

[11] Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) – Resources for Child Care Providers - This site presents providers, parents and government agencies with resources to identify and reduce children's exposure to pollutants that may be present in child care facilities.
https://www.epa.gov/childcare

[12] Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) – A FEMA factsheet explaining the various alerts and warnings that individuals may receive before, during, and after a disaster, including suggested actions for individuals and organizations to ensure timely receipt of warnings.
https://www.ready.gov/sites/default/files/2020-03/ready_know-your-alerts-and-warnings.pdf

[13] RCRC Toolbox - Prep Rally: Teaching Children the Basics of Preparedness - This interactive training is an introduction to Save the Children's Prep Rally program which, through games and activities, is aimed at engaging and educating children about preparedness. https://rcrctoolbox.org/toolbox/prep-rally-teaching-children-the-basics-of-preparedness/

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[14] [Ready.gov Kids](https://www.ready.gov/kids) – Reaady.gov provides a number of online resources for kids, teenagers, families, and caregivers/educators. And organizations about emergency preparedness, including games, factsheets, and skill development opportunities.
https://www.ready.gov/kids

[15] [Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance (TA)](https://rems.ed.gov/) – REMS TA is supported by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Safe and Supportive Schools, and provides technical assistance for emergency planning and response, as well as trainings, toolkits, and a complete virtual library of resources.
https://rems.ed.gov/

[16] [National Center for Missing and Exploited Children](https://www.missingkids.org/ourwork/disasters) - The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children provides resources for locating children who've been separated from their families. Here you'll find information about the National Emergency Child Locator Center and the Unaccompanied Minors Registry.
https://www.missingkids.org/ourwork/disasters

[17] [National Center for Missing and Exploited Children](https://umr.missingkids.org/umr/reportUMR?execution=e1s1) - Unaccompanied Minors Registry – This registry supports the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) by allowing the public to report information related to children who have been separated from their parents or legal guardians as a result of a disaster. This tool will enable NCMEC to provide assistance to local law enforcement and assist in the reunification of displaced children with their parents or legal guardians.
https://umr.missingkids.org/umr/reportUMR?execution=e1s1

[18] [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) – Reunification resources](https://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/reunification.html) - The CDC provides resources for child care providers and families on disaster preparedness and reunification.
https://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/reunification.html