

Knowledge Management Research: Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Communication Planning



Capacity Building
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Research Question

Preparing for a disaster can mean much more than planning to respond to floods, hurricanes, earthquakes, and other natural phenomena. Crisis situations such as a sudden data breach or system failure, workplace violence, death of an employee, or public health emergencies all require a coordinated, systematic, and deliberate response. Because the need to oversee child safety continues during times of disaster, agencies must ensure that they are sufficiently prepared to continue providing services under emergency circumstances.

Additionally, communication is a critical aspect of disaster management. In disaster situations, fail-safe communication is vital to work across the spectrum of operations. Preparing to respond by imparting knowledge and information in the form of mass education and public awareness campaigns, warning of impending threat of disaster, mobilizing resources, coordinating with stakeholders and multisystem partners, effectively messaging needs and plans to decision-makers, and conducting general activities in disaster situations all require clear, intentional, and thoughtful communication.

To assist child welfare agencies in building capacity to maintain operations during a crisis and better prepare for future disruptions, the Capacity Building Center for States developed the following questions to guide research on disaster planning, management, and communication:

- What important aspects of disaster planning and response should agencies be aware of?
- What issues related to messaging and communication planning should agencies consider?
- What are examples of child welfare agencies' current disaster plans?

These questions were used to inform a search of relevant literature and resources. Resources reviewed to address the research questions and findings are listed below.

Findings

Disaster Planning

Disaster plans are systematic procedures that clearly detail what needs to be done, how, when, and by whom before and after the time an anticipated disastrous event occurs and are often part of organizational business continuity planning. Preparing for disasters involves creating formalized plans, preparing to manage during a disaster, and enhancing critical infrastructure prior to a disaster.

Disaster Preparedness Resource Guide for Child Welfare Agencies

<https://www.aecf.org/resources/disaster-preparedness-resource-guide-for-child-welfare-agencies/>

Annie E. Casey Foundation (2009)

Provides a comprehensive compilation of resources and tools for disaster planning, mitigation, response, and recovery. Information in this guide is organized and presented in the context of a series of case vignettes, describes common pitfalls agencies face when managing disasters, and provides recommendations to avoid these barriers. This guide also provides links to additional resources.

Disaster Planning for Child Welfare Agencies Factsheet

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/disasterplanning/>

Child Welfare Information Gateway (2016)

Presents basic disaster planning concepts, including an explanation of why disaster planning is critical to agency operations, as well as high-level issues to consider when creating plans.

Disaster Preparedness & Response

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/topics/management/disaster-preparedness/>

Child Welfare Information Gateway (n.d.)

Provides links to standalone pages that contain information on preparing for, responding to, and recovering from disasters. This page also includes links to resources on child safety and well-being during disasters from federally funded and national technical assistance and professional organizations.

Disaster Preparedness and Relief

http://www.hunter.cuny.edu/socwork/nrcfcpp/disaster_relief.html

National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections (2009)

Silberman School of Social Work at Hunter College

Provides links to disaster preparedness and response resources compiled following Hurricane Katrina in 2005. Links address topics such as agency preparedness, information on trauma and stress, help for children and families, help for agencies and staff, and information on fostering and adopting displaced children.

Coping with Disasters and Strengthening Systems: A Framework for Child Welfare Agencies

<http://muskie.usm.maine.edu/helpkids/rcpdfs/copingwithdisasters.pdf>

O'Brien, Webster, & Herrick (2007)

National Child Welfare Resource Center on Organizational Improvement

Provides a framework for disaster planning and management in child welfare. This guide outlines procedures to consider, modify, and implement prior to a disaster, operational activities to take during a disaster, and postdisaster management.

Child Welfare Basics for First Responders

Child welfare agencies are entrusted with supporting, protecting, and caring for children and families in their communities. This work is complex and difficult even during calm times and, in the midst of natural or manmade disasters, can become even more so due to extreme circumstances, limited ability to interact with and track families, and the need to coordinate with multisector partners mobilized to respond to the disaster. The following information can assist child welfare agencies in liaising with disaster response professionals.

What Is Child Welfare? A Guide for Disaster Preparedness and Response Professionals

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/cw-disaster-preparedness/>

Child Welfare Information Gateway (2015)

Presents a basic overview of child welfare concepts, functions, and practices for disaster response professionals. As disaster professionals may encounter circumstances normally relegated to child welfare during disaster or emergency situations, information on how to respond appropriately and understanding downstream consequences of intervention and potential responsibilities outside of initial response could be helpful to strengthening response partnerships.

The Role of First Responders in Child Maltreatment Cases: Disaster and Nondisaster Situations

<https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/usermanuals/first-responders/>

Office on Child Abuse and Neglect (2010)

Gives general guidance for first responders on how to perform essential disaster response duties in a trauma- and development-informed way. Though information is intended for first responders, select information can be applied to child welfare professionals and agencies. This manual provides a high-level overview of general child welfare practices and processes and may be particularly helpful in disasters where first responders have increased access to children and families or child welfare professionals' capacity to investigate and monitor family safety and well-being is diminished.

Messaging and Communication Planning

Dissemination of timely and credible information can minimize the potential for loss of life and injury, help individuals understand the extent of the emergency, simplify first responders' tasks, accelerate the recovery phase, and minimize the overall impact of the disaster event on the community. Determining how and when to deliver messages internally and to the general public is important for how the message itself will be received. The following resources are related to the process of developing and delivering disaster preparedness and management communications.

Communicating in a Crisis: Risk Communication Guidelines for Public Officials

<https://store.samhsa.gov/product/communicating-crisis-risk-communication-guidelines-public-officials/pep19-01-01-005>

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2019)

Provides information for crafting and effectively delivering communications about public agency responses to disasters and crises. This guide relies on communication research to outline tips for staying on message, communicating complex or technical information to the general public, and using social media.

Leaders' Guide to Risk Communication in the Face of Emerging Public Health Threats

https://www.cstsonline.org/assets/media/documents/CSTS_FS_Leaders_Guide_to_Risk_Communication_Face_of_Health_Threats.pdf

Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, Uniformed Services University (n.d.)

Provides information on how to effectively communicate risk of public health emergencies to the public in order to minimize the psychological impact of an impending threat. This publication raises awareness of the psychological stressors associated with public health threats and addresses how to effectively handle them from a leadership perspective.

Field Guide for Developing a Risk Communication Strategy: From Theory to Action

<http://www1.paho.org/cdmedia/riskcommguide/RISKcommBKLETenFinal.pdf>

World Health Organization, Pan American Health Organization (2011)

Outlines needs and considerations for communication during the five phases of a public health emergency and offers guidance for public officials on how to handle public relations during disaster situations.

Leadership Communication: Anticipating and Responding to Stressful Events

https://www.cstsonline.org/assets/media/documents/CSTS_FS_Leadership_Communication_Anticipating_Responding_to_Stressful_Events.pdf

Center for the Study of Traumatic Stress, Uniformed Services University (n.d.)

Describes leadership behaviors that have been shown to shape public response during disaster and crisis scenarios and provides actionable advice on crafting messages according to communication principles.

State Child Welfare Agency Disaster Plans and Information

Federal law¹ requires state child welfare agencies to develop disaster plans. Doing so is a best practice that can help child welfare agencies be better prepared to serve children and families—both those that were previously in contact with the agency and those that may require the agency's assistance due to the disaster.

California Department of Social Services – County Child Welfare Services Disaster Response Plans

<https://www.cdss.ca.gov/inforesources/data-portal/state-plans/cws-disaster-response-plans>

Florida Department of Children and Families – Emergency/Disaster Plan

<https://www.myflfamilies.com/admin/publications/cfops/CFP-xx%20Pamphlets/CFP%20215-4,%20Department%20of%20Children%20and%20Families%20Emergency%20and%20Disaster%20Plan.pdf>

Louisiana Department of Children and Family Services – Emergency Preparedness

<http://www.dcf.louisiana.gov/page/537>

Ohio Department of Job and Family Services – 2015–2019 Disaster Plan

<http://jfs.ohio.gov/OFC/AppC-Disaster-Plan.stm>

Oregon Department of Human Services – Child Welfare Services Disaster Response Plan

<https://www.oregon.gov/DHS/CHILDREN/Documents/2019-APSR-Attachment-14.pdf>

Missouri Department of Social Services Children's Division – Emergency Operations Plan

<https://dss.mo.gov/cd/cfsplan/2020-2024/cd-emerg-plan.pdf>

North Dakota Department of Human Services – Disaster Plan

<http://www.nd.gov/dhs/info/pubs/docs/cfs/foster-care-disaster-plan.pdf>

Texas Department of Family and Protective Services – 2015–2019 Disaster Plan

https://www.dfps.state.tx.us/About_DFPS/Title_IV-B_State_Plan/2010-2014_State_Plan/Disaster_Plan.pdf

Vermont Department for Children and Families – 2020–2024 Child and Family Services Plan, Disaster Plan pp. 76–79

<https://dcf.vermont.gov/sites/dcf/files/FSD/pubs/CFSP2020-2024.pdf>

¹ Social Security 42 U.S.C. 62242 U.S.C. § 622 (2006)

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Suggested citation: Capacity Building Center for States. (2020). *Knowledge Management research: Disaster preparedness, response, and communication planning*. Washington, DC: Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

This product was created by the Capacity Building Center for States under Contract No. HHSP2332015000711, funded by the Children's Bureau, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

