

Creating a Disaster Preparedness Plan for your Family

Meredith Fields Lawler, LCSW

As springtime approaches, we often think of working in the garden, warmer weather, sunshine and the dreariness of winter being lifted. While all of this is true, spring can also bring some severe thunderstorms and tornados. In many areas of the country, this can be a dangerous time for people that rely on electricity for their survival. The thought of the power going out and your loved one being without oxygen can evoke panic in many caregivers. In order to combat stress, a plan needs to be created.

In a disaster, there is often not time to think and plan so this is best completed during a calm time. Post this plan where everyone in your family can see it and inform all who stay in your home and with your loved about your disaster plan. Being prepared is only useful if everyone is prepared. Below you will find some ideas on getting you started.



1. Know where your circuit breakers are for your home and how to check them.

If the power goes out it may simply be that a circuit breaker has tripped.



2. Call the American Red Cross in your area.

You want to talk with them about what disasters are common for your area, how you would be informed of disaster, where the evacuation routes are for your neighborhood and who to call in case of a disaster. The American Red Cross is a wealth of information and knowledge and should be your first line of defense. They also offer an entire line of

disaster preparedness items for purchase

(<http://www.redcrossstore.org/shopper/category.aspx?LocationId=1>). Having a household first aid kit and one of these kits is a great first step.



3. Call your power and gas companies.

If your loved one uses oxygen or any other medical equipment that requires electricity, your power and gas company may have a program where they will not terminate your service for non-payment and/or in an outage situation, and will attempt to get your utilities turned back on quicker. Find your most recent billing statement and call the number listed and speak to a representative about your situation. Some companies require a statement from your loved one's doctor in order to qualify for their programs. Once you have completed this, post the emergency number for your utilities companies so that in a disaster they are readily available to call. Always remember that if you or your loved one experience an emergency, call 911.



4. Be ready with extra oxygen.

If your loved one is on oxygen, ask the medical equipment company to send out e-tanks to be used during a time of disaster. Ensure you store the e-tanks in a safe location and know how to turn them on and off. If your loved one is on other medical equipment that requires electricity, call the medical equipment company and talk with the representative on how to be prepared during a power outage. They will be able to educate you on the specific protocol for the equipment your loved one uses.



5. Have a cooler ready for foods and medications that need to be kept cold.

Should the power go out and you fear it will be out for a while, it is best to be ready with a cooler and ice packs. You can buy ice packs for very inexpensively at stores like Wal-Mart and Target. At all times, you should have a 10-day supply of medications available.



6. Have battery-powered flashlights and radios, and packages of fresh batteries available.

Each room of your loved one's home should have at least one flashlight. Many plug-in flashlights can be charged while plugged into the wall and also have batteries as backup.



7. Create an emergency plan with the members of your household.

This Emergency Preparedness Checklist

(<http://img.medscape.com/article/709/697/709697-fig1.jpg>) from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the American Red Cross is a great tool to use to guide your discussions with your family.

Having some sort of a plan is better than not having a plan at all. If you begin to think about what you and your family would do during the time of a disaster, you can reduce your stress and anxiety and focus that energy on the here and now.

References

1. "Being Prepared If the Power Goes Out." Consumer Energy Center, 2015. Web. March 7, 2016.
2. Detweiler, Gerri. "5 Sticky Utility Bill Problems & What to Do About Them." February 1, 2016. Web. March 7, 2016.
3. "Personal Preparedness for Older Adults and Their Caregivers." Center for Disease Control and Prevention, March 17, 2015. Web. March 7, 2016.