

SHELTERING GUIDELINES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Emergency shelters and mass care facilities for families during a disaster should be well-designed, well-stocked, and appropriately staffed to promote the safety and security of infants and children. This document offers general guidance, suggestions and ideas - it is not a comprehensive guide. It is not intended to replace the actual experience and training that sheltering children and families require. Please note there are links provided in this document for additional information and resources.

General Guidelines for Shelters Providing Care to Families with Children

- Establish a shelter central registration for all families with children to track numbers, age and status of children at the shelter. [Instructions for Identifying and Protecting Displaced Children](#) (CDC Health Advisory)
- Develop systems to ensure security for unattended/unsupervised adolescents in shelters and other facilities that care for children in emergencies. [Standards and Indicators for Disaster Shelter Care for Children \(Appendix E\)](#) (National Commission on Children and Disasters: 2010 Report)
- Provide information to shelter staff and volunteers on the special safety and security needs of infants and young children. http://www.fema.gov/pdf/government/grant/2012/fy12_hsgp_children.pdf (Standards and Indicators for Disaster Shelter Care for Children (Annex B))
- Establish protocols to ensure children are protected from neglect, abduction, and sex offenders. Train shelter workers to identify and address suspicious and inappropriate activity. [Participant Handbook - Preventing Child Abuse and Neglect in Disaster Emergency Shelters](#) (National Resource Center for Child Protective) http://nrccps.org/documents/2006/pdf/Shelter_Participant_Handbook_final_Mar_2007.pdf
- Conduct criminal background checks on volunteers. [Recommended Guidelines for Conducting Background Checks on Volunteers](#) (National Commission on Children and Disasters)
- Work closely with county and local school districts to help young children return to normal pre-school/school routines as soon as possible. When the situation stabilizes, reconnect children/families with pre-disaster services and supports as available, such as Early Head Start/Head Start, home visiting, child care, preschool, and other school arrangements. http://www.fema.gov/pdf/government/grant/2012/fy12_hsgp_children.pdf (Standards and Indicators for Disaster Shelter Care for Children (Annex B))
- Provide information and written materials in multiple languages, as appropriate for the community, and provide translation services, as needed. [Cultural Awareness: Children and Youth in Disasters Podcast](#) (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)

Family-Friendly Policies and Practices

- Shelter children together with their parents/families, or guardians/caregivers. Encourage and support families to establish a routine for children to foster a safe, calm, nurturing & normalizing environment.
- Family areas should have direct access to bathrooms. Parents/guardians should be aware that they are expected to accompany their children to/from the bathrooms.
- Provide opportunities for children to play and socialize with other children; establish designated child-safe areas where children may congregate with supervision. [Simple Activities for Children and Adolescents](#) Activity ideas for children or adolescents during a power outage, storm, or other situations when they can't get outside. (The National Child Traumatic Stress Network)
- Set aside space for family interaction free from outside news sources to reduce a child's repeated exposure to the disaster.
- US Department of Homeland Security, *Children in Disasters Guidance (Annex B)* http://www.fema.gov/pdf/government/grant/2012/fy12_hsgp_children.pdf



SHELTERING GUIDELINES FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

Emotional Well-Being

- Give parents guidance in how to talk with their young children and teens after a hurricane. [Parent Guidelines for Helping Children after Hurricanes](#) (National Child Traumatic Stress Network)
- Assist parents in understanding common reactions or symptoms associated with a traumatic event. [Helping Young Children and Families Cope with Trauma](#) (National Child Traumatic Stress Network)
- Assist parents in recognizing the signs of stress that are common in young trauma survivors, and offers tips on how to help. [After the Hurricane: Helping Young Children Heal](#) (National Child Traumatic Stress Network); [Tips for Talking to Children and Youth After Traumatic Events](#) (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration)
- Seek help from local child mental health partners for children showing signs of emotional distress.

Child Health and Hygiene

- Remind families about importance of child hygiene, including routine hand-washing practices. Ensure an adequate supply of soap and paper towels for families at the facility.
- Clean shared environmental surfaces frequently touched or used by children (i.e. diaper changing surfaces, toilets, sinks, toys, doorknobs, floors) with bleach solution (1:10 part bleach-water) or child-safe commercial disinfectant on a regular basis. Establish protocols for diapering and diaper disposal.
- Ask parents/caregivers about their routine pediatric/child health care, e.g. medical home, health insurance, medications, special health care, and/or special education needs.
- Assess infant/child health needs prior to and during the incident and make needed referrals and linkages and contact local child health partners.
- Establish a plan of care for medically-dependent children that includes essential connections for medications and/or needed follow-up; assist families of children with special child health, early intervention or special education needs
- Provide secure transportation for children accompanied by a parent/guardian from the shelter to medical or other needed community services. The shelter should also address supervision of, and accountability for, the transportation of children/youth not accompanied by a parent/guardian.
- For infants/young children vehicles should be equipped with appropriate child restraint devices.
- Reinforce *Safe Sleep* practices for infants. Babies are safest when they are put to sleep on their backs (no tummy or side lying) on a firm surface (crib or pack-n-play) alone (discourage co-sleeping but DO place crib right next to parent/caregiver) with NO blankets, pillows, excess clothing, stuffed animals. <http://www.sidscenter.org/SafeSleep/videos.html> (National SUID/SIDS Resource Center)
- *National Commission on Children and Disasters: 2010 Report*, [Standards and Indicators for Disaster Shelter Care for Children \(Appendix E\)](#); <http://archive.ahrq.gov/prep/nccdreport/nccdrptape.htm>

Supplies and Nutrition

- Have essential age-appropriate supplies for infants and children, i.e. breastfeeding supplies, bottles,, diapers (various sizes), changing pads, baby wipes, diaper rash ointment, sip cups, and emergency clothing. [Supplies for Infants and Toddlers in Mass Care Shelters and Emergency Congregate Care Facilities \(Annex C\)](#) (Supplemental Resource: Children in Disaster Planning, U.S. Department of Homeland Security)
- Support breastfeeding mothers by providing a clean, comfortable, and appropriate space that ensures privacy; emotional support; and needed supplies. [Breastfeeding and Emergencies](#) (US Breastfeeding Committee)
- Provide infant formula as appropriate, such as milk-based, hypoallergenic and soy-based formulas.
- Provide appropriate nutritional foods for children (including breast-fed and bottle-fed infants)—various pre-mixed formulas, baby cereal, various stages of baby food.

