

COMMUNICATION · GUIDE 03

# Family Communication Plan

When cell towers are overwhelmed, do you know where to meet? Does everyone in your household?

In a major emergency, cell networks become immediately congested. During virtually every significant disaster, local cell service failed within minutes — not because towers were destroyed, but because too many people called at once. A communication plan requires twenty minutes of conversation with your household. Do it now, before you need it.

## ■ WHY PHONES FAIL WHEN YOU NEED THEM

Cell networks are built for average load — not crisis load. When a major emergency occurs, the surge in simultaneous calls overwhelms local tower capacity. Calls don't connect. Texts queue for hours. Data slows to nothing.

### TEXT FIRST, CALL SECOND

During network congestion, text messages require far less bandwidth than voice calls and are queued for delivery even when the network is overwhelmed. If you can't reach someone by call, try a brief text.

## ■ THE FIVE COMPONENTS

### 01 An Out-of-Area Contact

One person outside your region — a relative, a friend — whom everyone checks in with. Long-distance calls route through different network infrastructure and often succeed when local calls fail.

### 02 Two Meeting Locations

One near your home (a neighbor's steps, the corner of your block). One farther away if your neighborhood is inaccessible (a school, library, or community center). Everyone memorizes both.

### 03 Phone Numbers on Paper

Written down. Not just in your phone. If your phone dies or battery runs out, can you recall even three numbers from memory? A laminated card in a wallet solves this.

### 04 School and Workplace Procedures

Know your children's school reunification policy now. Know your workplace emergency protocol. These answers are available before a crisis — they're nearly impossible to find during one.

### 05 Plans for Different Scenarios

What if it happens during the workday? At night? If roads are blocked? Think through the most likely scenarios for your specific household.

**The out-of-area contact is the most underused piece of this plan:**

During a local disaster, all your local contacts face the same congestion problem. A relative in another state can receive calls and texts more reliably — and can serve as a relay point, letting everyone know who is safe and where.

## ⇒ ■ YOUR HOUSEHOLD PLAN — FILL IN & KEEP

Fill this in, then post one copy on your fridge and keep one in each go-bag or wallet. Review annually or when phone numbers, schools, or living situations change.

### HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS

Member 1 (Name + Phone)

---

Member 2 (Name + Phone)

---

Member 3 (Name + Phone)

---

Member 4 (Name + Phone)

---

### OUT-OF-AREA CONTACT (LIVES OUTSIDE YOUR REGION)

Name

---

Relationship

---

Phone ← Memorize this

---

Email

---

### MEETING LOCATIONS

Location 1 (Near Home)

---

Address / Description

---

Location 2 (Away from  
Neighborhood)

---

Address / Description

---

### SCHOOLS & WORKPLACES

School Name + Number

---

Reunification Site

---

Workplace Emergency # \_\_\_\_\_

**LOCAL EMERGENCY RESOURCES**

Nearest Emergency Shelter \_\_\_\_\_

County Emergency Mgmt \_\_\_\_\_

Non-Emergency Police \_\_\_\_\_

**FOR CHILDREN**

Help children memorize one phone number — the out-of-area contact or a parent's cell. Practice saying it aloud. A child who knows one reliable number has a real lifeline in an emergency.

Official Sources: [ready.gov/plan](https://ready.gov/plan) · [fcc.gov/consumers/guides/emergency-communications](https://fcc.gov/consumers/guides/emergency-communications) · [redcross.org](https://redcross.org) · [ready.gov/kids](https://ready.gov/kids)