

YOUR FAMILY EMERGENCY PLAN:

THE **7** LIFESAVING THINGS **YOU MUST KNOW** TO KEEP THEM SAFE



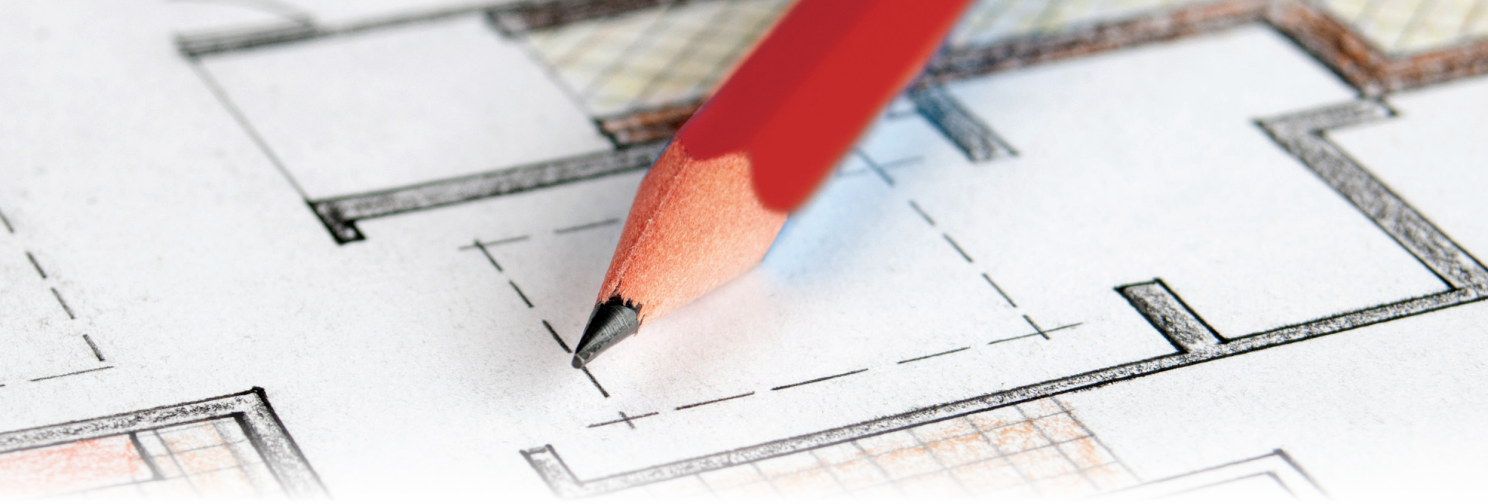


YOUR FAMILY RELIES ON YOU to make good decisions and to keep them safe. Having an emergency event plan that involves everyone makes sense. Make the plan, share the plan and train the plan. It sounds like a lot of work and a nearly impossible task, but you can do it. Chances are, you probably already have a loose plan and are working it to some degree.

Before now, most home emergency plans weren't created to deal with violent intruders or home invasions. Most plans, if any, were likely to be fire plans. Those plans probably included identification, alert and notification, containment and extinguishing, and evacuation (as well as rally points). We never had a fire plan. It never crossed my mind that my house would burn down. But, one day, it did! Thank God we weren't home when it happened, because we didn't have a plan.

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BUT, ONE DAY, IT DID!**

Although we never had a fire emergency plan, we've had home emergency plans for as far back as I can remember. They've always been loose plans that changed and morphed as my children became older and more capable. Although my children are grown, they are still home from college from time to time. It's probably necessary to beef up our emergency plans again.



I've been in law enforcement for more than 25 years, and what was once *personal* protection has become *family* protection. There was a time when I rarely carried a gun off-duty. Now it's rare that I don't carry a gun — even in the home. The world is changing, and I have seen enough to know that being prepared to defend against a violent assault at any time is anything but crazy.

Creating a home emergency plan starts with a list. Be sure to write it down when you begin so that nothing gets forgotten. How you begin directly impacts the outcome, so rather than thinking with an “if/then” mentality, you need to think with a “when/then” mindset. Reality is often stranger than fiction, so don't hesitate to imagine even the wildest scenarios. It's crucial to consider what *might* happen, and since that takes your mind there, you've already begun to train.

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

- WHEN AND HOW OFTEN ANY OCCUPANTS ARE HOME
- YOUR HOME'S SIZE, LAYOUT, SAFE AREAS AND DANGER AREAS
- CHILDREN'S AGES AND ABILITIES
- ENTRY/EXIT LOCATIONS AND THE SECURITY OF EACH
- LOCAL LAW ENFORCEMENT'S ABILITIES AND RESPONSE TIMES
- TOOLS AVAILABLE TO YOU AND YOUR FAMILY FOR DEFENSE
- COMMUNICATION WITH EACH OTHER AND THE OUTSIDE WORLD

The above list is not all inclusive, but it's a start. Write your list in outline form, leaving space to add details for each category. Those categories will likely spur thought-provoking sub-categories. For instance, if choosing a closet for a safe area, there's plenty to consider. What are the locking mechanisms, if any? Is there light and electricity in the closet? What about weapons? Can you hide them in there?

EMERGENCY CHECKLIST

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.





After you've created your list and have identified all of your assets and liabilities, think about the type of emergencies you might encounter. Any possible emergency is important, so list them out and take time to think about how you'll notify your family of each. Keep in mind that you might not be able to alert others in your home of the emergency at hand. Your mere separation in the home or on the property, the time of day, or the type of trouble that finds you might make immediate notification improbable or impossible.

SOME EMERGENCIES AND METHODS OF ALERT OR NOTIFICATION MIGHT BE:

■ HOUSE FIRE

Hopefully smoke detectors and alarms

■ HOME INVASION

Likely to create noise and commotion through yelling and crashing

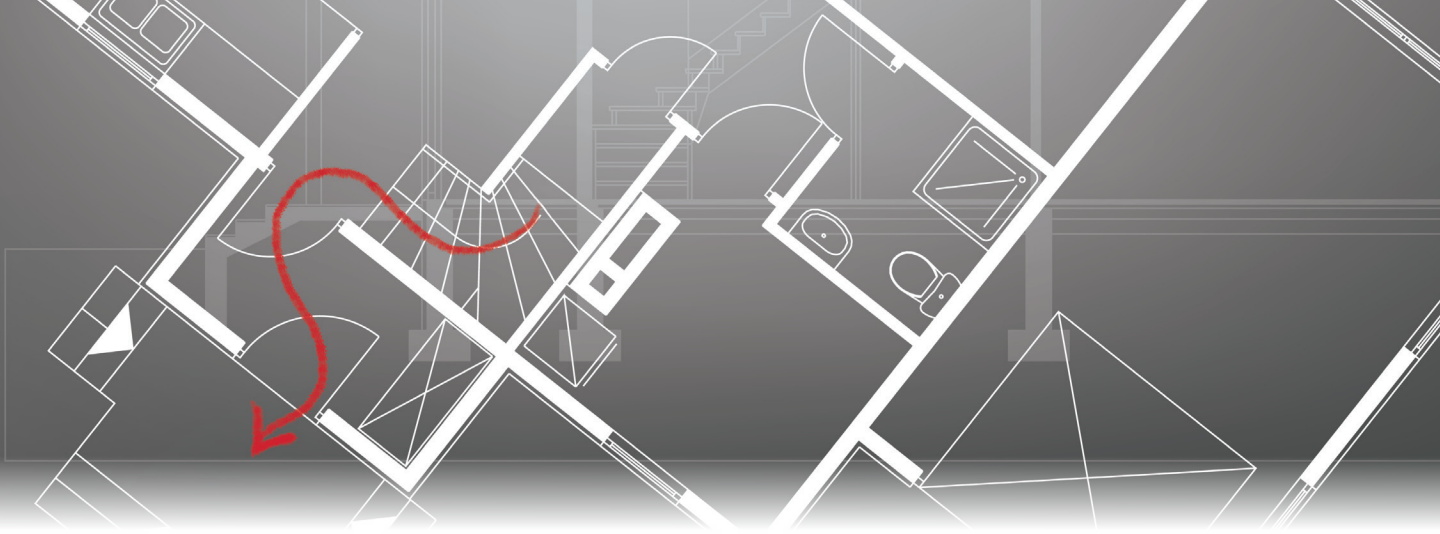
■ CIVIL UNREST

Verbal communication, either in-person or via telephone

■ DAY OR NIGHT BURGLARY

Verbal commands, noise or commotion

These are examples of everyday realities across the country, but you'll likely come up with your own scenarios specific to your locale, neighborhood and home. Two thoughts come to mind as I look at this list: How would I get everyone out of the house if necessary? How do I secure everyone in my home quickly if necessary? These are probably the two most important questions you could ask yourself when it comes to your family's safety.



There are some people who wonder why, other than for a fire, you would want to get people out of the house. Unfortunately, people in our country are divided in their views on how to best react in a self-defense situation. Nationwide, there are three different basic laws you'll need to consider as you formulate your plans. You should be aware and informed of each, along with its specific details regarding your jurisdiction of residence.

- 1 STAND YOUR GROUND:** No duty to retreat from a lawful situation before resorting to deadly force; not limited to your property (e.g. home or office).
- 2 CASTLE DOCTRINE:** Limited to real property, such as your home, yard or private office; no duty to retreat (use of deadly force against intruders is legal in most situations); some states even include personal vehicles.
- 3 DUTY TO RETREAT:** Must retreat from a situation if you feel threatened (use of deadly force is considered **ONLY** a last resort); may not use deadly force if you are safely inside your home.

A lot to take in, right? As I look at my home emergency plan, I'd be lying if I told you my first course of action would be to stand my ground. I don't want to shoot anyone whom I don't have to shoot. However, there are more reasons to stand and fight than there are to retreat. I'd have to consider how exactly I would get out of my home. There is no point of egress from my bedroom, and if someone who presented a deadly threat were to corner me there, I would likely be forced to defend myself.

Even if I could retreat and get out, I still need to consider who remains inside the home. My living quarters are on the first floor. Where is my wife? If my kids are home, are they upstairs? I'm not leaving anyone behind. What would you do? All of this needs to be thought out and included in your plan.



Securing my home against an intruder is as much a priority as getting out of my home during a fire. A friend of mine, who lives with only his wife, has an interesting method for staying secure: He has deadbolts on all of his entry doors, and not the kind for which you use a key from the outside and a lever from the inside. He has key access for the bolts – inside and out.

When he comes home, no matter who is home, he uses a key to get in. After inside, he uses a key to lock that door behind him. Crazy, right? No, he has a plan. Above each door, he keeps a key for the tumbler. This way, as a guest, I can get out and lock the door behind me. He has other well-thought-out plans for himself and visitors.

Each bedroom nightstand contains a key on a wrist lanyard in the drawer. There is also a flashlight placed with each key. A flashlight can be indispensable in unfamiliar environments for finding your way, and it can also be used to identify threats and non-threats. Overall, I think it's a bit over-the-top and excessive, but he's a high-profile individual and could possibly face a personal attack just for who he is. Excessive for me? Probably. But not so much for him.



Don't plan to do something just because I do it. When it comes to planning for home invaders, it's important to remember that firearms can be replaced by a variety of other weapons. Thinking outside the box beyond even knives, there are pepper sprays, batons, golf clubs, baseball bats and even fire extinguishers (which can be used for more than putting out fires). Consider alternate weapons for family members who aren't comfortable (or capable of) using guns.



CONSIDER ALTERNATE WEAPONS FOR FAMILY MEMBERS WHO AREN'T COMFORTABLE (OR CAPABLE OF) USING GUNS.

We've had guns around the home since my children were young, and my children have been trained and are comfortable shooting. I don't worry about them mishandling or playing with guns. What causes concern though has always been their friends — but that's for another article.

Training, over many years, has proven that unless you have a gun ON YOU, it's probably not going to be close enough when you really need it. Even though I carry a gun almost all of the time, there are times at home when I don't, so strategically placed firearms around my home are within an arm's reach 80 percent of the time. Keep in mind that I'm not an over-the-top security freak. These guns are near our sleeping areas and other areas we frequent — all hidden, all out of sight — and some couldn't be found even if you tried.



My children have their own living quarters upstairs, and their only points of egress are windows. Only three of these windows offer a semi-safe exit, and it's still a long way down. There are scenarios in which my boys may need to evacuate, but there are also scenarios in which we might need their help. There's a lot to consider when you look at the details.

If there is a commotion downstairs, they shouldn't just come blazing down to help, nor should they jump out of a window. They know to make an approach based on what they hear and identify. If someone comes in and gets the drop on me and my wife, we may need them to help us fight back. It's all part of the plan. Likewise, if someone comes in and goes right upstairs, we would use the same tactics. Assess the situation and take appropriate action.

There are people who say their wives and kids should lock themselves in a closet if someone breaks in. This tactic may be necessary, but neither my family nor I would be in a closet unprepared. Potential "safe closets" should always include flashlights and not just guns or clubs but also spare ammo. How about body armor? All these questions are part of forming a plan. Remember, chance favors the prepared mind.

**THERE ARE NO LIMITS AS YOU PREPARE AND PLAN.
MEDICAL SUPPLIES ARE
SOMETHING YOU MIGHT WANT
IN YOUR HOME AND VEHICLE.**

There are no limits as you prepare and plan. Medical supplies are something you might want in your home and vehicle. Depending on where you live and the first responders' response times, you may need those supplies. Med supplies can be gathered by searching online and buying piece by piece or by ordering a complete kit. However you get it, medical gear needs to be part of your plan.

HOME EMERGENCY PLAN

You can create your own plan here. Map out your home below, highlighting exit routes, safe areas, emergency supplies, etc.

A large grid of graph paper, consisting of 30 columns and 40 rows of small squares, intended for mapping out a home emergency plan.



When we travel without our children, my wife and I have plans as to how we will regroup if civil unrest occurs — not just where we intend to meet but where we will leave a note to be found. Our boys know to write where they went (and when) as well as any alternate rally points and what they've taken with them. They may find that the intended rally point has been compromised and that they need to head to an alternate location; if that happens, we know where to leave the note and how to place it so it's not destroyed by weather or time.

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SHOULD CIVIL UNREST OCCUR.
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There may come a time when you have to shelter in place without some of the usual amenities. We keep a kit that includes essential items for survival, which may sound crazy to some; remember though that if you have to lock-down at home for a while, you'll still need certain items. Home-kit components include water-purification gear, fire-starting materials, emergency food, medical supplies, a small hatchet and knife, several wool blankets, and more. We limited ours to a military-sized duffel that can be packed along easily if moving out is necessary.

As you formulate your home emergency plans, you need to take into account all that is laid out here — and more. My situation is not yours, and no two plans will be the same.



By failing to plan, you are planning to fail. Take time to map out your home, and know all possible entry and egress points. Look at your security and the locks on your doors and windows, then evaluate potential safe areas in your home. Look toward new technologies for security. You don't even need to answer the door anymore; new camera and communication technologies allow you to talk to someone on your porch without opening the door (all the while, you could be accessing a firearm and shuttling your family to a safe area).

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It's not just about fire hazards anymore. When planning, you're only limited by your imagination, so take time to really consider what's expected of each family member in case of a crisis. Physically walk through and identify safe areas and evacuation routes. Be sure everyone who should know knows where weapons are kept as well as how or when to access them. None of this can be a "once-and-done" setup. It takes time and effort. Most importantly, prepare yourself to prepare your family for a safe future.



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