

# Reunification After a Community-Wide Disaster: Planning Tools for Schools

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# Reunification After a Community-Wide Disaster: Planning Tools for Schools



U.S. Department of Education  
Office of Safe and Healthy Students

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# Webinar Presenters



FEMA



Cindy Atkins

NATIONAL  
CENTER FOR   
**MISSING &  
EXPLOITED**  
CHILDREN®  
[www.missingkids.org](http://www.missingkids.org)



Sharon Hawa

# Agenda

*Overview of Post-Disaster Reunification*

Disaster Reunification Challenges, Tools,  
and Resources

Q&A Session

# Introduction



# How Children May be Separated from Families

Communication challenges

Custodial disputes

No tracking/location tools

Deceased legal guardian

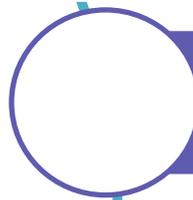
Wandering or abduction

Long-distance displacement

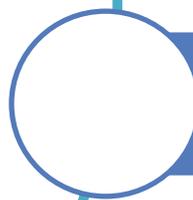
# Importance of Reunification Planning



Needed after natural hazards & human-caused events



Risk from trauma increases



Children may be exposed to danger



Schools are trusted sources of information

# School's Roles

The Voice For  
Children

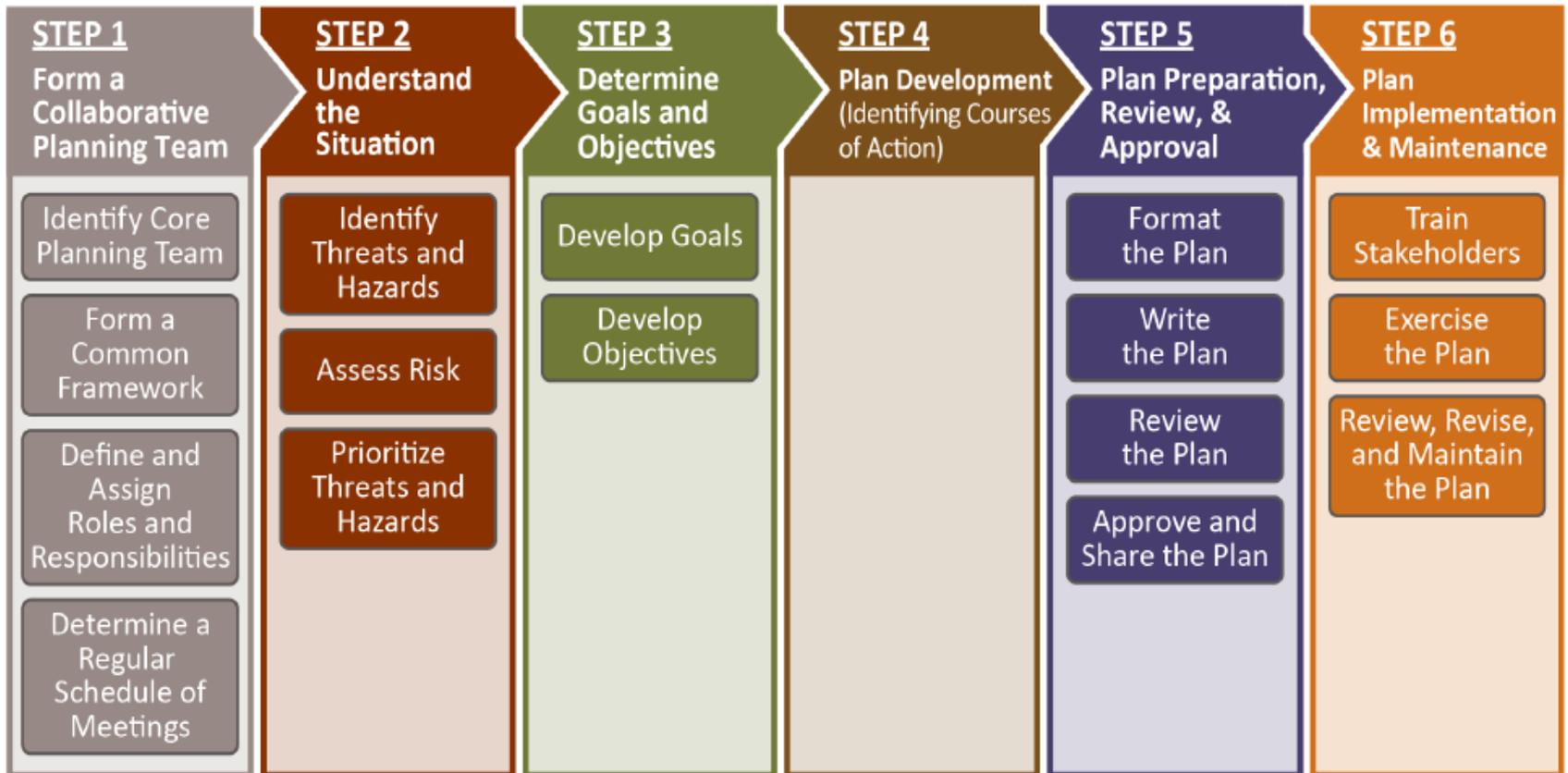
A Conduit of  
Information

# Community Planning Team

Input should be gathered from:

- Families
- School educators, administrators, and staff
- First responders
- Community groups
- Before- and after-school programs
- Student health personnel (at school, school district, and state level)
- State and local public health practitioners
- Child welfare agencies
- Representatives from LEA and SEA
- Emergency management agency representative

# Post-Disaster Reunification Planning

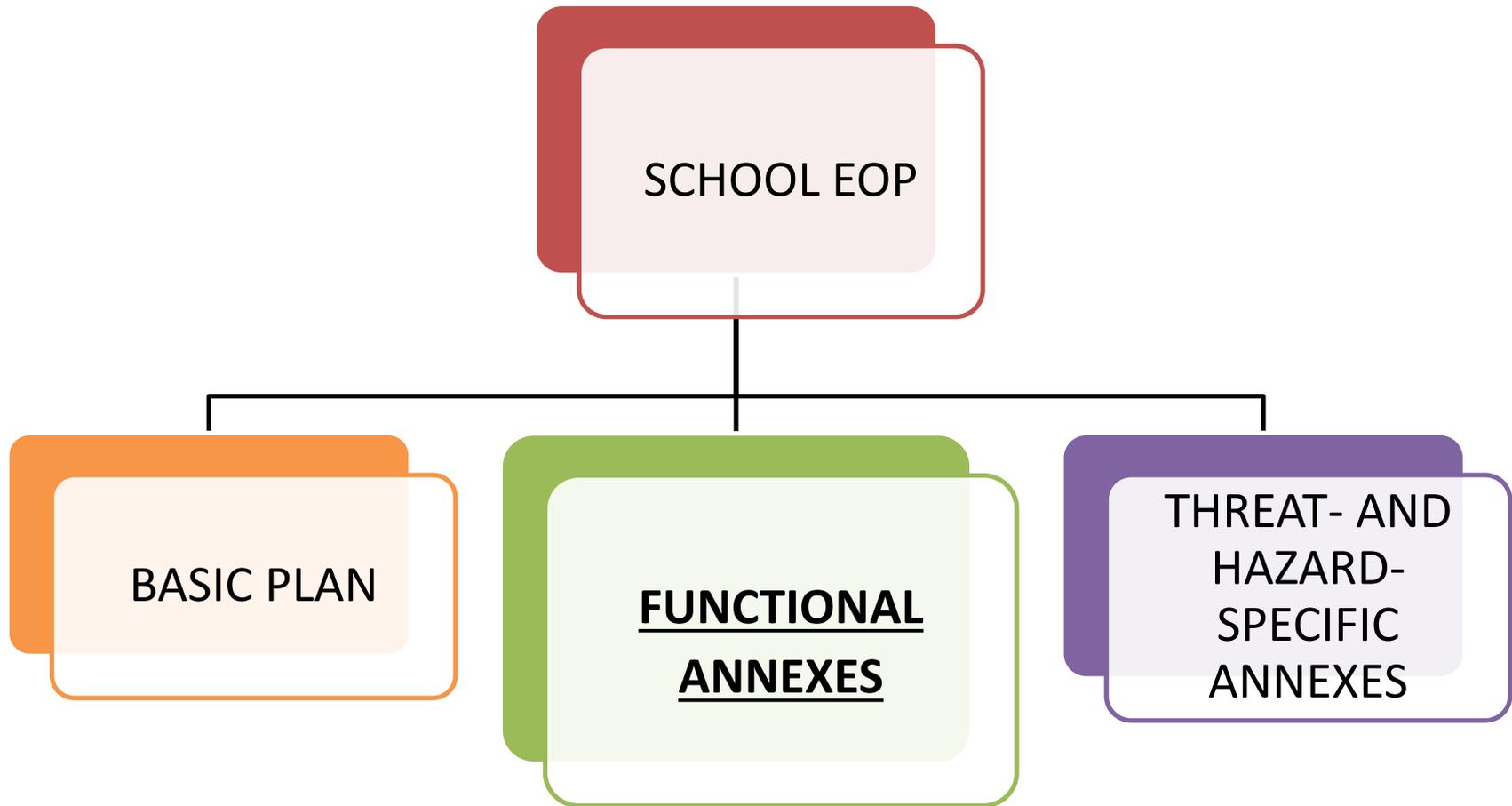


# School Post-Disaster Reunification Planning

## Address:

- Before, during, and after an event
- Prevention + Protection + Mitigation + Response + Recovery = Preparedness
- All settings and all times:
  - Before-/After-school programs
  - Field trips
  - Athletic events
  - Study abroad

# Create a Reunification Annex



# Train and Participate in Exercises

## Training

- External partners
- Internal stakeholders

## Exercises

- Planning
- Participation

# Promote Family Preparedness

Home Make a Plan

## Make A Plan

Make a plan today. Your family may not be together if a disaster strikes, so it is important to know which **types of disasters** could affect your area. Know how you'll contact one another and reconnect if separated. Establish a family meeting place that's familiar and easy to find.

Step 1: Put together a plan by discussing these 4 questions with your family, friends, or household to start your emergency plan.

1. How will I receive **emergency alerts and warnings**?
2. What is my **shelter** plan?
3. What is my **evacuation** route?

Related

- Individuals with Disabilities
- Military
- Pets and Animals
- Seniors
- Financial Preparedness
- Get Tech Ready
- Ready Campus
- Ready Indian Country
- Ready Responders
- Evacuation
- Safety Skills

## BACKPACK EMERGENCY CARD

It is important to have your emergency contact information with you in case of an emergency. Complete the cards below and keep one in your wallet and one in your child's backpack.

Cut Here Fold Here

<p><b>BACKPACK EMERGENCY CARD</b></p> <p>Child's Name: _____                  Date of Birth: _____                  Home Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____                  School Name: _____                  School Phone Number: _____                  Special needs, medical conditions, allergies, or important information: _____</p> <p>DIAL 911 FOR EMERGENCIES </p>	<p>Parent/Guardian/Caregiver</p> <p>Name: _____ Email: _____                  Cell Phone: _____ Alternate Phone: _____                  Text Okay: Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Emergency: _____                  Name: _____ Email: _____                  Cell Phone: _____ Alternate Phone: _____                  Text Okay: Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Emergency: _____</p> <p>Out of Town Contact</p> <p>Name: _____ Email: _____                  Cell Phone: _____ Alternate Phone: _____</p> <p>DIAL 911 FOR EMERGENCIES</p>
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 U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

CS259306-D

# Agenda

Overview of Post-Disaster Reunification

*Disaster Reunification Challenges, Tools, and Resources*

Q&A Session

FEDERAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT AGENCY  
AND  
NATIONAL CENTER FOR  
MISSING AND EXPLOITED CHILDREN

*Disaster Reunification Challenges, Tools, & Resources*



FEMA



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## STATISTICS

- Planning for children in disasters is different than planning for the general population.
- Children are considered among the most vulnerable, especially in a disaster.
  - Children are not just small adults.
  - Anatomically and psychologically different.
- Children make up approximately 25% of the nation's population.
  - On a typical weekday, ~69 million children are in schools and child care.



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## CLASSIFICATIONS OF CHILDREN

### Missing Child vs. Separated Child vs. Unaccompanied Child

- A **missing child** is a person younger than 18 whose whereabouts are unknown to a legal guardian.  
*(As defined under federal law 42 U.S.C. § 5772)*
- A **separated child** is a child who is separated from both parents or from his/her previous legal or customary primary caregiver, but not necessarily from other relatives.  
*(As defined in FEMA's Post-Disaster Reunification of Children: A Nationwide Approach)*
- An **unaccompanied child** is a child who has been separated from both parents and other relatives and is not being cared for by an adult who, by law or custom, is responsible for doing so.  
*(As defined in FEMA's Post-Disaster Reunification of Children: A Nationwide Approach)*



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## LESSONS LEARNED: HURRICANE KATRINA

- 1.5 million people evacuated, including 200,000 children.
- Families were separated during evacuation or rescue.
- Unaccompanied minors alone in gen-pop shelters.
- Photos were the quickest way to locate the missing.



- Efforts helped to resolve and reunite 5,192 cases of displaced children.
- Last child was reunited with her family in TX 7 months after landfall.



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## NCMEC'S ROLE IN HURRICANE KATRINA



NCMEC assisted in the following capacities:

- Established a hotline to handle calls about missing children (**34,045**)
  - Now known as the **National Emergency Child Locator Center (NECLC)**.
- Provided field support to help find missing children/family members and identify unaccompanied minors.
- Efforts helped to resolve and reunite 5,192 cases of displaced children.
- The last child was reunited with her family in Texas in March 2006.



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## PLANNING CHALLENGES

- Reunification is not often a priority in emergency response operations.
- Many families do not have/practice a family emergency plan.
  - Schools, hospitals, childcare, foster/congregate care programs, camps/scout programs
- Schools and/or hospitals often become overtaxed as “community caretakers” in disasters.
- No immediate messaging for parents on where to go/who to call to report/find loved ones.
- No identified clearinghouse to intake reports, tips/leads = inflated missing persons lists.
- No entity or process to manage/care for unaccompanied minors.
  - Missing child (LEA) vs. Unaccompanied child (?)
- Unaccompanied Minors (1,10 or 100).
  - Care, Identification & Reunification
  - Custodial rights
  - HIPAA & Privacy issues
- Trafficking (Sex, Drugs, Labor).
- Autism Spectrum Disorder & Wandering.



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## PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

- Identify and integrate ways for gen-pop to reunify themselves.
- Establish Reunification & Information Centers to place around designated routes.
- Designate a safe location to gather unaccompanied children, if ever needed.
- Consider planning for a call center/hotline to manage reunification-related calls.
- Ensure that PIOs have speaking points regarding reunification and it is reiterated as often as possible.
- Monitor social media for disaster reunification needs.
- Reach out to state and national reunification partners as soon as possible.



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# NATIONAL **REUNIFICATION** PARTNERS & RESOURCES



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## NATIONAL REUNIFICATION PARTNERS

- **National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC)**
  - Disaster Call Center: National Emergency Child Locator Center (NECLC)
  - Field Resources: Team Adam; Project ALERT
  - Online Tool: Unaccompanied Minors Registry
- **American Red Cross**
  - Reunification partner during disasters
  - Manages adult reunification support in a disaster
    - Safe and Well
  - Manages and/or supports a majority of emergency shelters following a disaster
- **Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)**



FEMA



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- **National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC)**

- Disaster Call Center: National Emergency Child Locator Center (NECLC)
- Field Resources: Team Adam; Project ALERT
- Online Tool: Unaccompanied Minors Registry
  - The first national data collection tool used to facilitate the tracking and reunification of unaccompanied minors as a result of a disaster.
  - Expedite the reunification of unaccompanied minors with their families, guardians and caregivers when separated by a disaster.
  - Provide reports back to law enforcement and reunification staff.

<http://umr.missingkids.org>

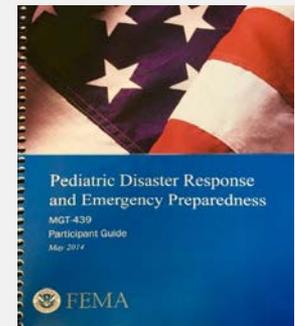
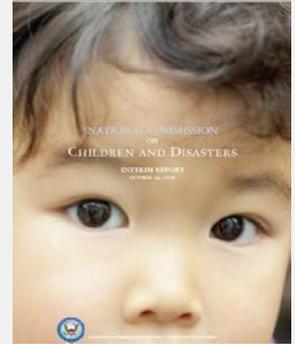


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# NATIONAL REUNIFICATION RESOURCES

- **National Commission on Children in Disasters (NCCD)**
  - Community of national child-serving organizations that advocated for policies that ensure the well-being of children and their families before, during and after a disaster.
  - 81 recommendations that need to be met to properly care for children in disasters.
- **IS:366 – Planning for the Needs of Children in Disasters**
  - Online FEMA course outlining the needs of children in disasters.
- **Pediatric Disaster Response & Emergency Preparedness MGT-439**
  - Free 2-day class on pediatric response and emergency preparedness offered by TEEEX (Texas A&M Engineering Extension Service).

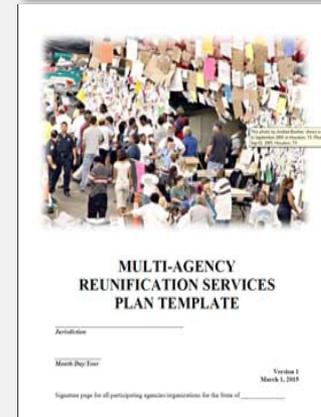
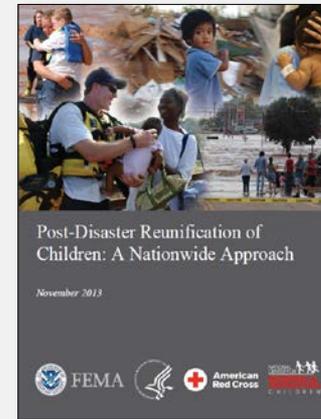


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# NATIONAL REUNIFICATION RESOURCES

- **Post-Disaster Reunification of Children**
  - Provides a framework for reunification planning.
  - Lists nationwide reunification resources available to support.
- **Multi-Agency Reunification Services Plan Template**
  - Provides a template to create a general state reunification services plan.
  - Lists all available reunification resources available to support.



**Thank you!**

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# Agenda

Overview of Post-Disaster Reunification

Disaster Reunification Challenges, Tools,  
and Resources

*Q&A Session*

# Pose Your Questions

To ask a question, use the Q&A box on your screen.

You can also email us at [info@remstacenter.org](mailto:info@remstacenter.org).



# Thank you!

## Cindy Atkins

- Federal Emergency Management Agency

## Sharon Hawa

- National Center for Missing & Exploited Children



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**PREVENT**



**PROTECT**



**MITIGATE**



**RESPOND**



**RECOVER**

# Join the Web Chat NOW!

HOME ► REUNIFICATION

Use this forum to discuss techniques and lessons learned related to helping students reunite with their families following emergency events.

## Post-Disaster Reunification Web Chat



**Myers Paul**

Posts: 23

7 seconds ago

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