

7. Making a plan for emergencies



What is an emergency plan?

An emergency plan sets out the best way of supporting your relative in case of an emergency. An emergency plan should contain the information that helps to stop an emergency turning into a crisis.

Family emergencies can take many different forms. The need for emergency support may arise because you or another family carer:

- suddenly becomes ill or has an accident;
- needs to go into hospital as an emergency or a planned short-notice admission;
- has to be elsewhere for some other reason, for example to care for another family member or friend.

Emergency plans are often seen as tools for family carers whose relative lives at home with them, but they can be equally useful if your relative lives in their own flat and you are part of their support network.

Family emergencies may result in either temporary or permanent changes in the life of your relative. This means that planning for emergencies is very closely linked to planning for the future (see Section 9: Making a plan for the future).

Why is an emergency plan helpful?

- The nature of emergencies means that often there isn't time to stop and think about the best thing to do; an emergency plan can be drawn up when you have time to think and discuss ideas with family, friends and paid workers.
- Without a plan, decisions may be made by someone who does not know your relative well and is perhaps not the best person to do so. They may be decisions that take your relative away from the people and places that are familiar: this can make someone feel they have no one to talk to, become anxious, distressed or depressed and even be labelled as having behaviour or mental health problems as a consequence.
- If your relative has complex support needs it could be especially helpful to have a plan in place as there are often fewer available options and therefore more planning can be needed. Without this planning your relative may have to move from their local area or to somewhere unsuitable.
- It reduces anxiety as people with learning disabilities and family carers feel more in control if they have a plan that they are happy with – for this reason, it will be helpful even if you never use it.
- It's a good way to begin to think about longer-term plans; thinking about what works in an emergency can help you to determine what needs to be planned for the future.

How to make a plan

If you regularly provide a substantial amount of care, you have the right to request a carers' assessment and a local authority has a duty to respond to that request. You can have this assessment whether or not the person you care for has had a community care needs assessment or if the local council has decided they are not eligible for support. As part of this assessment you should be asked about emergencies and offered help with planning for them or signposted to an organisation who is responsible for this. If your relative has a care and support plan, an emergency plan should be included in this; an annual review could be used to develop or review an emergency plan.

The arrangements for making and using emergency plans vary between local authorities and some are better than others. If you contact your local council they should be able to tell you about the way in which this is done locally. The development of emergency plans is usually the responsibility of:

- a care manager or reviewing officer
- a carers' centre
- a local Mencap group or other learning disability support organisation, or
- an organisation that might also provide emergency care.

Most local areas have a Carers Emergency Alert Card scheme and some also have a service that provides short-term replacement support.

You may want to find out what happens in your local area before you start to develop a plan for your relative. You can then decide whether you think those arrangements would

work for your family or whether you would prefer to develop your own plan using the ideas outlined below. If you decide to use the format below it is a good idea to share it with the care management team and make sure there is an alert on your relative's records to say that they have an emergency plan and where it can be found. If your relative has a care and support plan the details of the emergency plan should be included in this.

If you are giving support to more than one relative with a learning disability, it is best to make a separate plan for each person as they are likely to have different support needs and different people involved in their lives.

We have produced a template for an emergency plan at the back of this guide. It suggests which information you should include in it. Here are some things you may wish to consider to get you started:

1. Think about who might help you to draw up an emergency plan.
2. Think about possible emergencies that might arise.
3. Put 'cushions' in place before an emergency happens.
4. Think about who might help out in an emergency.
5. Look at the support options in an emergency.
6. Make a list of what is important to and for your relative to keep them safe and well in an emergency.
7. Make a 'to do' list to put things in place now.

1. Think about who might help you to draw up an emergency plan

You could get a small group of people together – family, friends, paid workers, neighbours – and share ideas. Or you could start by sitting down with your relative and talking about your ideas together and then share the ideas with others as the next step.


2. Think about possible emergencies that might arise

An emergency that you cannot plan for or predict may arise. However, there may be some events that you think are more likely to happen because of your family situation, your own health needs, or you may have other caring responsibilities, such as for an elderly parent. You may want to think about what could possibly go wrong and use this as a basis for your planning.

What might happen?	What do we need to think about in that situation?

3. Put 'cushions' in place before an emergency happens

Putting things in place before an emergency happens will make your arrangements go more smoothly and may prevent a crisis. We have made a checklist of things to think about. You may want to add to it or amend it.

Tick box	Suggestions for what to put in place	Further information
Letting people know you have caring responsibilities		
	ICE (In Case of Emergency) number on phone. Emergency services look for this.	On your contact list on your phone type ICE and add phone numbers of people you would want to be contacted. They can alert people to the fact that you are a family carer. You can put more than one number (ICE1, ICE2 etc).
	Carer's card	Most councils or carers' centres produce a card for carers. In some areas a carer's card is part of a scheme to provide emergency support for a short period in your own home.
	Message in a Bottle 	The Lions 'Message in a Bottle' scheme is for carers to put details of the person they care for on a standard form and in a common location – the fridge. A sticker located on the outside of the fridge indicates to paramedics that a message in a bottle can be found in the fridge. Your carers' centre should know how you can get hold of the 'bottle'.
Calling for help		
	Would a Telecare call button be helpful?	Local councils usually run a Telecare scheme: trained operators are alerted when a call button is pressed following an accident or emergency and carers will come to the house (using an external key safe). There is a small monthly charge for this service.
	If you have a Telecare button, does your relative know how to use the button to call for help?	
	Does your relative know how to use a phone to call for help?	You could put emergency contacts into the 'contacts book' on your phone. Also, there are phones in which you can put the photo of the contact with their number: the photo is pressed to dial the number.

Tick box	Suggestions for what to put in place	Further information
Phone numbers		
	Does the local authority have the phone numbers of people who need to be contacted in an emergency?	You can ask the council to keep their numbers on the electronic records for your son/daughter – but you should first check that they are happy to be included on the database.
	Do the people mentioned in your plan have each other's phone numbers?	If an emergency occurs it is easier if you need to phone only one person. That person can then contact all the others on the list to make arrangements.
	Do you, and the people who will help in an emergency, have the contact number for the learning disability team and the out of hours service?	You may want to put these numbers on your fridge or noticeboard, or in your phone contacts. The out of hours number is usually reached through the main council number.
Essential information about your relative		
	Does your local authority know that you have written a plan and where it can be accessed?	You should make sure the plan is part of your relative's care and support plan. You may want to give a copy to key people, including any daytime or short breaks services that your relative uses.
	Have you written an important to/important for sheet (see below: point 6) to show what would help to keep your relative safe and well?	See point 6 for an example.
	Have you written information to describe how your relative likes to communicate and how others can best communicate with them (this is sometimes called a communication passport)?	This is particularly important if your relative finds it difficult to communicate. You could include information that would be helpful if your relative was upset or anxious.
	Have you prepared a sheet with any essential health information?	
Making sure people can get in and out of your home		
	Who has spare keys to your house?	It's helpful to say who the key holders are in the emergency plan.
	Have you shown your relative (if it's appropriate) how to unlock the front door – especially at night when you may have additional locks?	They may need to let a neighbour or the emergency services into the house if you are unwell.

4. Think about who might help out in an emergency

Some families will know immediately who might help in an emergency. Others may initially think they have no one, but will often find people who are willing to be of assistance by using some of the tools outlined in this guide (see 'circles of support' in Section 3). The more people involved in your relative's life, the easier it will be to organise support in an emergency.

People can help by doing practical things such as cooking a meal or driving your relative to hospital at visiting times. Or they can provide direct support by going to stay with them, having them to stay, or providing help at certain times in the day. They can pick up the phone to have a chat and provide reassurance.

You can use the template at the back of this guide to create a 'relationship map' of the people in your relative's life. These might be:

- family members who may live nearby or further afield (they can give support by phone);
- friends: these could be your friends or your relative's;
- paid supporters – people working in services or people employed through a personal budget. Short breaks (also known as respite) services may be able to provide support, or alternatively you may be able to get funding for some additional support from a person already working with your relative;
- community organisations – this may be a faith group you belong to, a community centre or a lunch club.

You can put the name (or a photograph) of the person whose plan it is in the centre of the map. The names of people who are more involved in your relative's life go in the ring nearest to the

centre and the people who are less involved go in the outer ring. Write beside the name who they are or how they are related to the person in the centre.

When you have filled it in you can think about how different people might help. You might also need to ask people if they are willing to be part of the plan (for example ask a neighbour whether they will keep a spare front door key or keep your relative company whilst waiting for other arrangements to be made). Use the 'to do' list (see example below) to note what needs to be done.

In the options we have included natural supports (family, friends and other non-paid people who are part of your lives) as well as paid support. Natural supports may be more within your control and your relative may be more comfortable with them. However, a paid support worker already involved in their life could play a very helpful role. If your relative is receiving social care funding, you could think about how this could be used to provide support in an emergency, for example, if they have a direct payment it could be used to fund individual support.

Making a visual emergency contact list

One family used a 'relationship map' to make an emergency contact list. They put everyone's phone numbers and photographs alongside their names. They gave copies to everyone in the plan and also put a copy on the fridge. This meant that in an emergency everyone had each other's contact details so could phone around and implement the plan. Anyone looking at the plan knew the names of the contacts closest to the person as they were nearest to the centre.

5. Look at the support options in an emergency

You may have a clear idea about what you would like to happen, but this may also depend on the nature of the emergency. Here are some things to think about when looking at the options:

- Is there a scheme for emergency replacement support in your area? This is likely to be someone coming into your home for up to 72 hours and it may be a generic service rather than specific to people with learning disabilities.
- You may need to think about immediate support and also slightly longer-term support; for example you may have a family member who would need to travel to get to your home.
- Is there a friend or neighbour nearby who might be willing to 'hold the fort' until other arrangements can be put into place?
- Think about whether your relative could stay at home, even if they would need support all the time. It is often easier to arrange support than to find a place to stay (for example a residential short breaks service) and may be less stressful for your relative as it will be more familiar.
- Does your relative have a personal budget that they are using for individual support? Would any of the workers providing support be willing and able to provide additional support in an emergency?

You can use the emergency plan template at the back of this guide to think through some of these options and then decide which work best for you.

John's story

John lives with his elderly mother in a flat owned by the local authority. John has lived in the area all his life and knows many local people. His mother is not well and may need to go into hospital for treatment. Before an emergency plan was written, John and his mother had not talked about what would happen in the future.

Through looking at the best options in an emergency, John and his mother talked about future plans and are keen that the tenancy passes to John. John said that he did not feel confident about cooking meals but would like to start doing this for himself and his mother.

The local authority agreed that John could use some of his personal budget on a worker who is supporting him to learn to cook. This worker would be able to give more time to support John if an emergency arose, such as his mother going into hospital.

6. Make a list of what is ‘important to’ and ‘important for’ your relative to keep them safe and well in an emergency

An emergency can be stressful, especially if the person who provides most of the day-to-day support is not around, perhaps because they have been rushed to hospital. There may be lots of changes to a normal day and disruptions to usual routines, causing worry and anxiety.

A few pieces of key information can prevent problems arising and help a person to feel less anxious. So it is really helpful to write down as much information as possible – particularly in the case of a person who has difficulties expressing what they want or need.

This sheet can be used as a checklist for someone who knows your relative well and only requires a reminder, or it can provide essential information for someone less familiar with their needs and preferences.

The sheet has two columns:

- What is important **to** me: here you can write all the things that your relative likes, are important in their life and that helps their day to go well.
- What is important **for** me: here you can write all the things that help to keep your relative safe and well.

Some people may have a person-centred plan (see Section 2) which will include a lot more detail, but it is always helpful to have a sheet summarising what is important in a person’s day-to-day life.

Things that are important TO me to make my day go well	Things that are important FOR me to keep me safe, healthy and well
<p>I like to start the day by being woken up gently and having my breakfast somewhere quiet.</p> <p>I speak to my brother Darren most evenings – he lives a long way away but we enjoy chatting about what we have been doing. If my dad was unwell this would be even more important to me.</p> <p>I hate showers but enjoy having a bath.</p> <p>If I have to stay somewhere away from home I like to take certain things with me. These are: my headphones and MP3 player, photos of my family, a fleece and slippers.</p>	<p>I get very anxious when anyone close to me is in hospital and need people to explain to me what is happening.</p> <p>I would need someone to arrange for me to visit my dad if he was in hospital otherwise I would go out and look for him.</p> <p>I need a reminder to take a tablet for my blood pressure every morning before I have breakfast.</p> <p>I get upset if people I don’t know touch me or hug me.</p>

7. Make a 'to do' list to put things in place now

You can use a 'to do' list, like the one below, to make a note of things you need to find out and arrange for the emergency plan. As you work through the suggestions above you could make a note of things you want to follow up.

To do	Who will do it?	Tick when completed
Check whether the neighbour at No. 46 will have a spare set of keys.		
Check whether a friend would be willing to come to the house for a few hours until a paid supporter arrives.		
Show my son how to use the phone to call for help.		
Find out about a direct payment: ask if my son could have one to one support to go to places on a Saturday afternoon.		



Questions to ask

What arrangements does my local authority have for helping families to develop an emergency plan?

If we write a plan, how can we make sure that the local authority knows about it and uses it when an emergency arises?

If the implementation of the plan costs money, how can I find out whether funding will be available in an emergency?

Whom to ask

Contact your local authority or the carers' centre.

Ask a care manager/duty care manager to arrange for an alert to be put on your relative's file to say they have an emergency plan. If you do not receive a satisfactory answer raise the issue with your local Mencap group or carers' centre.

Find out whether your relative's personal budget could be increased if an emergency arose to cover the cost of additional support, or discuss the plan with a care manager and see whether they agree that it is a realistic plan.

Notes



To find out more you could look at

The Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities has produced a booklet for older family carers that includes information about planning for emergencies. There are also booklets for siblings and people with learning disabilities.

<http://www.learningdisabilities.org.uk/publications/supporting-you-older-family-carer/>

Hft's website has useful information about using: Personalised Technology (sometimes known as Assistive Technology) to help people do everyday things more easily, live more independently and stay safe. Examples of this include big picture phones to make it easier to call people, medication dispensers and alarm buttons.

<http://www.hft.org.uk/Supporting-people/Our-services/Personalised-Technology/>