

“Be disaster aware, take action to prepare!” September is National Preparedness Month and we focused last week on how to “Be Informed”! I noted that there are four universal building blocks of emergency preparedness that FEMA suggests we focus on this coming month – Be informed, Make a Plan, Build a Kit and Get Involved. This week, we focus on How to Make a Plan.

We never really know how we will react to a situation until that situation actually happens. We may even react differently to the same type of situation at different times in our lives. The best way for us to be sure that we will react favorably is to plan ahead and practice what we plan.

Many of us take our health for granted; but not everyone has adequate hearing, sight, or physical abilities. Many times, we may not know that a person is challenged, just by looking at them. People who are faced with a disability or illness may need to plan differently than others. It is vitally important that they stay in touch with their support networks and for their support networks to be aware of their plan, including where they will seek shelter or evacuate.

Everyone should make a list of family, friends, and others who will be a part of their plan. Include a relative or friend in another area or state who would not be affected by the same emergency and who could help if needed. Make sure everyone knows how you plan to evacuate your home, school, or workplace, and where you will go in case of a disaster. Make sure that someone in your personal support network has an extra key to your home and knows where you keep your emergency supplies. Teach them how to use any lifesaving equipment or medicine in case of an emergency. If you use a wheelchair, oxygen or other medical equipment, show friends how to use these devices so they can move you or help you evacuate. Be sure to practice your plan with your personal support network. Consider your service animals or pets while you are planning and practice your plan with them, too.

If you use medical equipment in your home that requires electricity to operate, talk to your health care provider about a backup plan for its use during a power outage. Talk to your employer and co-workers about what type of assistance you might need in an emergency. Talk about any communications difficulties, physical limitations, equipment instructions and medical procedures that might arise during an emergency. Participate in drills or practices when they are offered.

Be sure to include a communications plan, too, since your family may not be together when a situation happens. Plan how you will contact one another and review what you plan to do in different situations. Use a support person who is outside of your immediate area as the communications contact, since communications may be limited near the location of the disaster or event. Again, plan, plan, plan; share your plan, then practice, practice, practice with your personal support network. You will all be more confident in taking the actions necessary if you have prepared together! Be Safe Out There!