

BANANAS HANDOUT

Preparing For An Emergency – Information for In-Home Caregivers

Four-year-old Jenny bumped her head on a table edge and bleeds profusely... Two-year-old Andrew tripped and knocked out his front tooth... Three-year-old Sandra vomits after her sister fed her half a bottle of children's pills... Six-year-old Billy smashed his finger in the car door... Such emergencies do occur under the most watchful eyes of parents or child care providers. This Handout seeks to inform in-home caregivers on how to prepare for such emergencies. In the case of Jenny, for example, the best course of action would be to call 911, then notify the parents. Andrew should see a dentist. Sandra's caregiver should call poison control. And Billy needs to be taken to a clinic.

Whether you are a parent or an in-home caregiver, it is important to take the following steps to prepare for an emergency:

A. Always have each child's medical authorization form and emergency information available.

Attached to this Handout is a card with a medical authorization form on one side and emergency information on the other. If you have to bring a child to a hospital emergency room, you may need to present a medical authorization form signed by the child's parent. Some hospitals may even require a signed copy of their own form. Find this out ahead of time. It is critical that parents sign the authorization form **before** leaving the child in your care. Keep the emergency information card handy so that you can notify the parent immediately. (The cards are available at BANANAS in English, Spanish, Chinese and Vietnamese.)

The completed, signed and dated authorization form should be easily accessible. Many providers keep it in a folder by the telephone. You should have one document for each child, even if you are caring for more than one child from the same family. This makes the information easier to locate. Be sure to take the card with you on outings, field trips, park excursions, etc. You should also post emergency numbers next to the telephone. This list should include the telephone numbers for the parents and a back-up person (see item B. below); the pediatrician, family doctor or clinic; the nearest hospital; and the **Poison Control Center, 1-800-876-4766**.

In a crisis, the calmest person can get confused with numbers. When calling 911, you may not be able to recall the address or cross street. Stay on the telephone line, because the operator can trace 911 calls and send an ambulance. In-home caregivers should ask the parents to write down the home address and telephone number and post that next to the phone.

B. Arrange for a "back-up" person if you care for more than one child.

If you need to seek treatment for an injured child, someone else will have to supervise the other child/ren in your care, or to help notify the other parents. It is crucial that you have an agreement with somebody – a friend, family member or neighbor – who can assist you on very short notice. If you are caring for the children of two or more families, maybe one of the parents can assist you. Keep the telephone number of this person close-by. Since you need to rely on someone who is reachable by phone, the best choice is someone who works nearby and is able to leave his/her job temporarily. A non-working, stay-at-home person may not be easily reachable because s/he may be in-and-out of the house. A neighbor who works at home may be ideal.

You should also discuss with the parents who is authorized to pick up the child/ren or come into the house. Be sure to know where to go in case of earthquake, fire or other natural disaster. You need to know where the local school or shelter is and which neighbors can help you transport the children. Keep a portable "emergency bag" for each child – three days of food, clothing, diapers, toys, snacks etc. – in case you must leave the home with the child/ren in an emergency.

C. Periodically check the medicine cabinet and work with the parent to stock up on needed items.

The cabinet should be in a safe place where children cannot reach it. However, it must also be easily accessible and in clear view for adults. The essential contents of a medicine cabinet are:

- thermometer
- non-aspirin fever-reducing medication (**children's** Tylenol, Motrin, Advil)
- band-aids and small and large squares of gauze
- IPECAC syrup (to induce vomiting in cases of poisoning). **Use only if advised by the Poison Control Center!**
- tweezers (to remove splinters)
- soap (for cleaning cuts)
- first aid/basic life support instructions

Make a list of any supplies which need to be replenished. Inform the parents of these items and ask them to purchase them as soon as possible.

When you are doing your periodic medicine cabinet check consider the following:

- 1) All prescription medicines and some over-the-counter medicines are dated and should be replaced after that date. Also notify the parent of medicine which has changed color or become cloudy or hardened. Make sure that the old medicine is either flushed down the toilet or thrown out in a **sealed** trash container.
- 2) You need the parents' consent to administer any medicine to a child – even for medicines like children's Tylenol. Have blank parental consent forms handy so that you can ask parents to complete one when necessary.
- 3) Follow these cautions when giving medicine to children:
 - Make sure to use medicine spoons or droppers to administer the medicine.
 - Do not use tableware spoons – they are not accurate measures.
 - Follow the dosage chart and age limits on the label. Don't give more than the recommended dose.
 - Do not call the medicine candy, or say that it tastes "yummy" or "delicious," in order to coax children into taking it.
 - Do not give the child medicine if s/he is not sick, or if you have not asked the parents.
 - Never give aspirin – it may cause a serious reaction in some children.

D. Be aware that many children will put anything in their mouths.

When a child swallows a questionable substance, call the **Poison Control Center, 1-800-876-4766**, before taking any action. If the child is seriously ill (pale, vomiting, unconscious), call **911**. Poisons include innocent-looking plants, vitamins, perfume, birth-control pills, cigarettes, etc. If children eat anything in large quantities, they can be poisoned. When you are doing your periodic safety check, make sure you look under the sink and in the garage for poisons within children's reach. Inform the parents of unsafe situations.

E. The best preparation is to be trained in first aid and Basic Life Support techniques.

While you wait for help to come, start administering first aid. Your actions in an emergency are important and can save a life. For further information on first aid and Basic Life Support classes, call BANANAS at 658-7353. Classes are given at hospitals, the Red Cross and the American Heart Association. Basic Life Support and disaster instructions are also available in the front of the telephone directory.

F. Always contact the parents – even if you have called 911 or a doctor.

Whenever a child is injured, it is important to call the parent. Let the parent know what has happened and what you have done to help. In non-life-threatening emergencies, call the parent first. The parent may want to take the child to the doctor or hospital, or the parent might want to meet you there. Not all injuries require the parent to come and get the child. But, by keeping the parents informed, you allow parents to make the decision themselves.