

PrepTalks Discussion Guides are companion documents to PrepTalk video presentations and question-and-answer (Q&A) sessions. These guides help translate the research and expertise showcased in each PrepTalk into actionable steps to improve disaster preparedness. This discussion guide accompanies the PrepTalks given by Dr. Lori Peek and Sarah Thompson, who illustrate the importance and value of preparing our nation's youth for disasters.

After watching Peek's and Thompson's presentations and Q&A sessions, use this discussion guide and additional resources to ensure that your community has planned for the needs of children in disasters and that your youth preparedness activities are effective.

PrepTalk: Children and Disasters – Reducing Vulnerability and Building Capacity

[Dr. Lori Peek](#) is director of the Natural Hazards Center and professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of Colorado Boulder. She studies vulnerable populations in disaster and is co-editor of [Displaced: Life in the Katrina Diaspora](#), and co-author of [Children of Katrina](#).

In her PrepTalk, Peek acknowledges improvements in addressing the needs of children in disasters, and gives emergency managers five specific ideas to reduce the vulnerability of children to disasters:

- Ensure that every child attends a safe school.
- Educate children about risk and risk reduction.
- Listen to and involve children so they can help themselves, other children, and adults.
- Encourage children's ingenuity and creativity.
- Cultivate anchors, advocates, and strong institutions for children.

We need to actively involve children in emergency management, preparedness, response, and recovery activities.

Dr. Lori Peek

PrepTalk: Youth – The Key to Building a Culture of Preparedness

Sarah Thompson is the Director of U.S. Emergencies for Save the Children, where she leads emergency preparedness, recovery and psychosocial programming. She is the author of the [Prep Rally curriculum](#), an innovative program that teaches children preparedness skills through play. Thompson's PrepTalk focuses on ways to involve youth in improving their disaster preparedness.

Invest in youth. The way to build [a culture of preparedness] is to focus on youth and children.

Sarah Thompson



Emergency managers tend to think of children only in terms of their vulnerability to a disaster, but there is opportunity to work with children before a disaster strikes. “Kids love to learn,” Thompson said. “They love to bring home what they learn.” That makes children great safety and preparedness advocates.

Families of school-age kids who bring home preparedness materials are **75% more likely** to have a household plan they discussed as a family, and twice as likely to have participated in a home drill.

Preparedness in America, August 2014, p. 33

Partners for the Discussion

Encouraging youth preparedness requires the involvement of the whole community from the children themselves to their parents, teachers, counselors, administrators, emergency managers, first responders, and government officials. We encourage you to discuss youth preparedness in your community with a wide array of partners, including members of emergency management agencies, school authorities, family and teachers’ associations, youth serving organizations, public health authorities, and child care organizations.

Discussion Prompts

Topic One: Assessing Your Communities’ Plans for Children and Disasters.

In 2010, following Hurricane Katrina, the Commission on Children and Disasters delivered a [report to Congress](#) on what needed to be done to improve disaster response and recovery for children. The report stressed that the unique needs of children must be more thoroughly integrated into planning and that children be made a distinct priority in all disaster management activities. Appendix B to the report provides an index of recommendations and responsible entities, including states, tribes, territories and local governments. Consider using this index and the U.S. Department of Education’s [Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans](#) as a check to ensure your community has thoroughly considered the needs of children. For example:

- Have we incorporated education, child care, juvenile justice, and child welfare systems in our disaster plans, training, and exercises?
- Have we integrated mental and behavioral health for children into public health, medical, and other disaster management activities? Have we adequately considered children with disabilities and access and functional needs? Do our school emergency operation plans (EOPs) include a Public Health, Medical, and Mental Health Annex?
- Are we planning for the number of children in our community (roughly 25 percent of the U.S. population are children)? Do we have access to data and other resources that will help us to characterize the diversity of children in our community (for example, by age, race/ethnicity, immigrant status, and income)?
 - o The Annie E. Casey Foundation [Kids Count Data Center](#) provides demographics and key indicators of child well-being in the United States.
- Do our plans for shelters or temporary housing for families with children include access to needed services? Are there Memorandums of Understanding in place?

- ❑ Are our schools and child service organizations aware of community actively encouraged to participate in emergency management exercises and other activities?
- ❑ Do our Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster have representatives with expertise in child protection or school safety?
- ❑ Re-opening schools and childcare facilities is critical for community recovery. How do our EOPs and recovery plans address reopening schools, to include facilities, transportation, staff and teachers?

Topic Two: Youth Preparedness Education

Both Peek and Thompson emphasize the importance of youth preparedness education. “Facing the unknown without guidance is scarier than preparing in advance,” Thompson said. Peek reminds us that “exposure to disasters is increasing and children remain the most vulnerable.” Thompson discusses three myths surrounding youth preparedness education.

- **PERCEPTION #1:** Educators and parents think that discussing risks and hazards with children is too scary for them. **The truth is** that teaching children basic preparedness skills and letting them know that it’s alright to be afraid in disaster situations makes them better prepared to handle those disasters.
- **PERCEPTION #2:** Some believe that they’re already prepared because they have taken certain preparedness actions. **The truth is** preparedness is an ongoing activity. Drills need to be practiced and emergency kits need to be updated to reflect current realities as children grow and needs change.

Perceptions of Youth Preparedness Education	
Perception	Truth
It's too Scary	Better Equipped
We're Already Prepared	Ongoing Activity
My Child is Safe With Me	Many Environments

Source: Sarah Thompson PrepTalk

- **PERCEPTION #3:** Parents think that their children are safe with them. **The truth is** that children are often in environments that do not include their parents such as schools and daycares. Equipping them with the skills and understanding to handle disasters when away from their parents is an important element of youth preparedness.

[FEMA's Youth Preparedness Program Catalog](#) lists many disaster preparedness education programs and resources available for schools and youth serving organizations to include in their programming. This catalog also includes tables that identify the resources and activities by age, topic, and type of activity. Examples include:

- The [Save the Children’s Prep Rally](#) provides a fun ways for kids to participate in disaster preparedness.
- [The Pillowcase Project](#) is a free, interactive preparedness program designed for youth ages 8 to 11 that teaches safety, emotional coping skills, and personal preparedness. The Pillowcase Project was sponsored by Disney and developed by the American Red Cross.
- [Student Tools for Emergency Planning](#), or STEP, is a classroom-based emergency preparedness curriculum for fourth- and fifth-graders designed in an easy, ready-to-teach format. Students will

learn about disasters, emergencies, and hazards, and how to create a disaster supply kit and family emergency communication plan.

In addition, the [United Nations has created a game](#) based on local risks communities face. It comes in several languages and can be adapted to your community's needs. And the [Resilient Children/Resilient Communities project](#) from Columbia University and Save the Children provides a convenient list of youth education resources for preparedness.

Peek reminds us that the “drivers of children’s vulnerability are varied with no one solution.” Vulnerability is situational and dynamic. We must consider the personal attributes of the child, including age, race/ethnicity, gender, socio-economic and health status, abilities, and coping skills. Considerations for the broader environment include: the household; social, cultural, and economic environment; and the natural and built environment.

Children are a great community link. Children are the bellwethers of resilience. After a disaster, how quickly children can cope and recover is a very good indication of how the overall community recovers.

Sarah Thompson

Questions for discussion include:

- Does our community have a good inventory of schools, childcare facilities, and youth service organizations in our community? Do we have points of contact for these organizations?
- What are our primary hazards and threats, and how do we address those specifically in our youth education?
- What are state or local requirements regarding safety drills (e.g., fire drills, tornado drills, lockdown drills)? For example, the American Heart Association lists which states require CPR training in schools. Are these sufficient or should we consider adding additional drills or training for other relevant hazards and threats?
- How can we incorporate youth preparedness education into standard school curricula? Incorporating preparedness topics with standard subjects such as science, health, and technology ensures the program is well integrated and consistent throughout a child’s education with age appropriate content.
- How do we integrate preparedness education outside of school programming? Are there before or after school programs, youth activities, or other options we may want to support?
- How can we tap older, high school youth to mentor younger children in preparedness?
- How can adults model good preparedness behavior for children?
- How can we ensure parents and guardians know their child’s schools’ safety plans?

41% of adults with children in school or daycare **do not know** where their child or children would be evacuated to if their school had to evacuate.

Children in Disasters: Do American’s Feel Prepared? A National Survey; February 2016

Topic Three: Reducing the Vulnerability of Children's Surroundings

Peek challenges the emergency management community to ensure that every child attends a safe school. In the context of disasters, this includes the physical properties of the buildings, ensuring that they are built or retrofitted to withstand local hazards such as earthquakes or hurricanes; have effective communications; backup generators and fuel; and water, food, and medicine for occupants. This also means ensuring that schools have comprehensive emergency response and long-term recovery plans.

FEMA provides guidance on developing a comprehensive strategy for natural disaster building safety in [Safer, Stronger, Smarter: A Guide to Improving School Natural Hazard Safety](#). This guide builds upon the earlier [Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans](#). The Department of Education's Readiness and Emergency Management for Schools (REMS) Technical Assistance Center offers a new mobile applications [SITE ASSESS](#) to help school personnel examine school buildings and grounds.

Questions to discuss include:

- Are our school buildings prepared for our most likely hazards such as earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, or hurricanes? What mitigation measures are possible and how can this work be funded?
- Have we recently examined school buildings and grounds to assess safety and security?
- Are the schools in our community designated emergency response shelters?
- Are there programs in place to ensure that daycares have appropriately safe facilities? And that staff are taking preparedness actions?
- What plans do we have in place to ensure that children have safe spaces to return to after a disaster?
- For long term displacement, how can we ensure children have a place to resume their schooling as quickly as possible? Having children back in school or childcare allows parents to resume their work schedules and is critical for community recovery. It is also crucial to ensure children's educational continuity and so that they do not miss vital lessons.

Topic Four: Involve Children in Preparedness, Response, and Recovery

Thompson and Peek discussed the importance of inviting children and youth to get involved in their own preparedness, response, and recovery planning. FEMA has created a [Youth Preparedness Council](#) where students can have their voices heard amongst the emergency management community at a national level.

Teen Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) programs are already available in many school districts. Teen CERT is a training program in basic response skills including, fire safety, fire safety, light search and rescue, team organization, and disaster medical operations. For areas that do not currently have a Teen CERT program, FEMA has provided guidance on [starting a program](#). There is also a [webinar](#) produced by FEMA and the Department of Education on how Teen CERT programs can be integrated into school emergency preparedness programs.

Students can also learn skills to help with life-threatening emergencies at [You Are the Help Until Help Arrives](#).

Questions for discussion include:

- How can we start/expand Teen CERT programs in our community?
- How can our youth engage in our community's emergency planning efforts?
- Does our emergency management office have an internship program?
- Can our community start a Youth Preparedness Council?
- Are there ways to count volunteer hours for students who participate in emergency preparedness activities?
- How can we capture stories of youth in our community who have experienced disasters?
- What can we learn from youth in our community about disaster preparedness, response, and recovery?
- In addition to listening to youth, have we also thought about ways to actively engage youth? They often have the time, creativity, and energy as well as a strong desire to engage. Are we making space for children and youth in the places where decisions are being made that influence their lives?

Recommended Next Steps

- Ensure school EOPs outline comprehensive plans for a variety of threats and hazards.
- Emergency management and first responders should schedule regular meetings with the appropriate stakeholders who serve youth to synchronize planning efforts.
- Work with local school authorities and other youth serving organizations to discuss how to integrate disaster preparedness into school curricula.
- Review your existing plans and exercise schedule to ensure that youth are incorporated both as receivers of aid but also as participants as much as possible.
- Identify gaps in the resilience of school facilities, including structural issues, plans, and supplies.

Additional Resources

- FEMA has created significant resources focusing on youth preparedness.
 - An [overview of resources](#) can be found on the FEMA website.
 - [The National Strategy for Youth Preparedness Education](#)
 - [Youth Preparedness: Implementing a Community-Based Program](#)
 - [Teen CERT: Launching and Maintaining the Training](#)
- Save the Children has several resources including:
 - [Unique Needs of Children in Emergencies](#)



- [Get Ready. Get Safe. Disaster Checklist for Child Care Professionals](#)
- [Still at Risk: U.S. Children 10 Years After Hurricane Katrina](#)
- [Prep Rally curriculum](#)
- [Youth Service toolkit](#)
- The [Natural Hazards Center](#) offers various resources on vulnerable populations in disaster through their *Research Counts* series, including child- and school-focused entries.
 - [Children, Distress, and Disaster: How Adults Can Help](#)
 - [Supporting Children in All the Spheres of Their Lives: Lessons from Katrina](#)
 - [Infant Feeding in Emergencies: How to Support Families During Evacuation and Sheltering](#)
 - [America's Deathtrap Schools](#)
- [A guide from GeoHazards International](#) discusses considerations for reducing non-structural hazards inside schools such as furniture and other unsecured items within a school.
- The Department of Education's REMS Technical Assistance Center has a number of initiatives and resources work to build preparedness capacity of schools and their community partners.
 - [Technical Assistance](#)
 - [Emergency Preparedness Resources](#)
 - [EOP Interactive Tools](#)
 - [Virtual Trainings](#)
 - [Live Trainings \(by request\)](#)
 - [Tool Box](#)
- [CUIDAR](#) – which means “take care” in Spanish and Portuguese – is an international project that offers resources for encouraging youth voices and child-centered approaches to disaster risk reduction.
- [Children of Katrina](#), Alice Fothergill and Dr. Lori Peek