

1-2-09 Predict and Prepare

Some things are predictable. We should prepare for those things. For example: after a long day at school, children are tired, cranky and very hungry. They need healthy snacks, a smile, a listening ear and fresh air waiting for them when they get home. Some children will need quiet time, for chilling out, a little down time. That has to be watched, though, so that it is in balance and not a total escape from dealing with life. Let them rest and the stories will come later, probably at bedtime. Sound familiar? So, you see; we can prepare for the predictable, especially when we have had the opportunity to learn from experience.

This is the first of many columns on *How to Prepare*. I'll do some research for you and gather together the advice of those in the know. Isn't that one of the roles of local boards of health? We help people to prevent, to prepare and to respond.

In the winter, we prepare for snow and ice storms. Only a couple weeks ago, parts of New England were hit with a severe ice storm. I bet some of those people bought some of those stretch over your boot things that have little points on the bottom for traction on ice. Broken bones and back injuries are a foreseeable consequence of ice storms. Sometimes they necessitate the opening of shelters. Ask your local board of health where the shelter is for your community, how many people it can accommodate and whether or not it allows pets.

In my small town, we need to have some water on hand before storms because when we lose electricity we lose our well pumps and that means we can't even flush the toilet. We need to start a fire and melt snow. While it is not safe for drinking, we can fill containers for flushing down the toilet. Yeah, it's gross. Sanitizing wipes are usually not necessary but a Godsend in dire, waterless situations. If you know someone who likes to drink jug wine, ask for some of the bottles. The American Red Cross tells us to plan on a gallon a day per person and to plan on at least three days worth. Once the glass jug is cleaned and dried, it is a durable, clean container that will last years, as opposed to the plastic variety that can deteriorate and leak. Also, the glass and the metal cap are of the earth and easily return to the earth. Plastic is not of the earth and needs to be recycled in order to continue its usefulness.

In preparation for storms, we also need a nonperishable food supply. In New England, we are less likely than other areas to suffer a landslide, earthquake or a devastating flood. So, our supply kit does not necessarily need to be in an actual kit that we can grab and run with. My pantry, and probably yours, always has some crackers, canned milk or the boxed kind that does not need refrigeration, tuna fish, peanut butter, canned tomatoes and a variety of beans. That'll do. Use them and rotate them. Just remember to have on hand an old fashioned can opener. I've never had an electric one but with arthritis developing, I might just have to consider one and when I do, I'll have to make a storm kit and put in the hand cranked can opener.

What's missing? Asking this question of children is a fun game. It's fun to hear what the various ages think is important. Flashlights, batteries, candles and matches are a necessity. Keep the batteries out of the flashlights (where they can corrode and ruin the flashlight) in zip lock bags with a piece of paper with the date, or, replace them in the spring and fall, when you change the batteries in your smoke detectors.

What else will we absolutely need but might not be able to get? It wasn't that long ago when families "stormed" the video stores before inclement weather. Now, many of those businesses are out of business. Now, children have their cell phones, with pictures, texting, emails and internet access. They encounter the world through YouTube. Many households only have cell phones now. Even if that is the case, to prepare for power outages and cell service interruptions, keep an old plastic plug-in for times when signals are interrupted. Technology sure is buzzing along at a fast clip but some of the old fashioned ones are the simplest and serve us well in unusual times that sever us from our customary resources. In fact, emergency preparedness officials are on the lookout for ham radio operators!

So, no, we don't need to rent movies but it is a good idea to have cards, games and craft materials on hand. I worry that families don't. I hope that I am worrying needlessly and that all families play some games not requiring electricity or batteries. I always watched with wonder and delight, when my children enjoyed the occasional power outage because they got to have a fire in the fireplace and candles and card games. They'd be having a blast and then, as soon as the power came back on, they'd exclaim, "Hooray!" and run to the phone and television. As I said, some things are predictable.

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