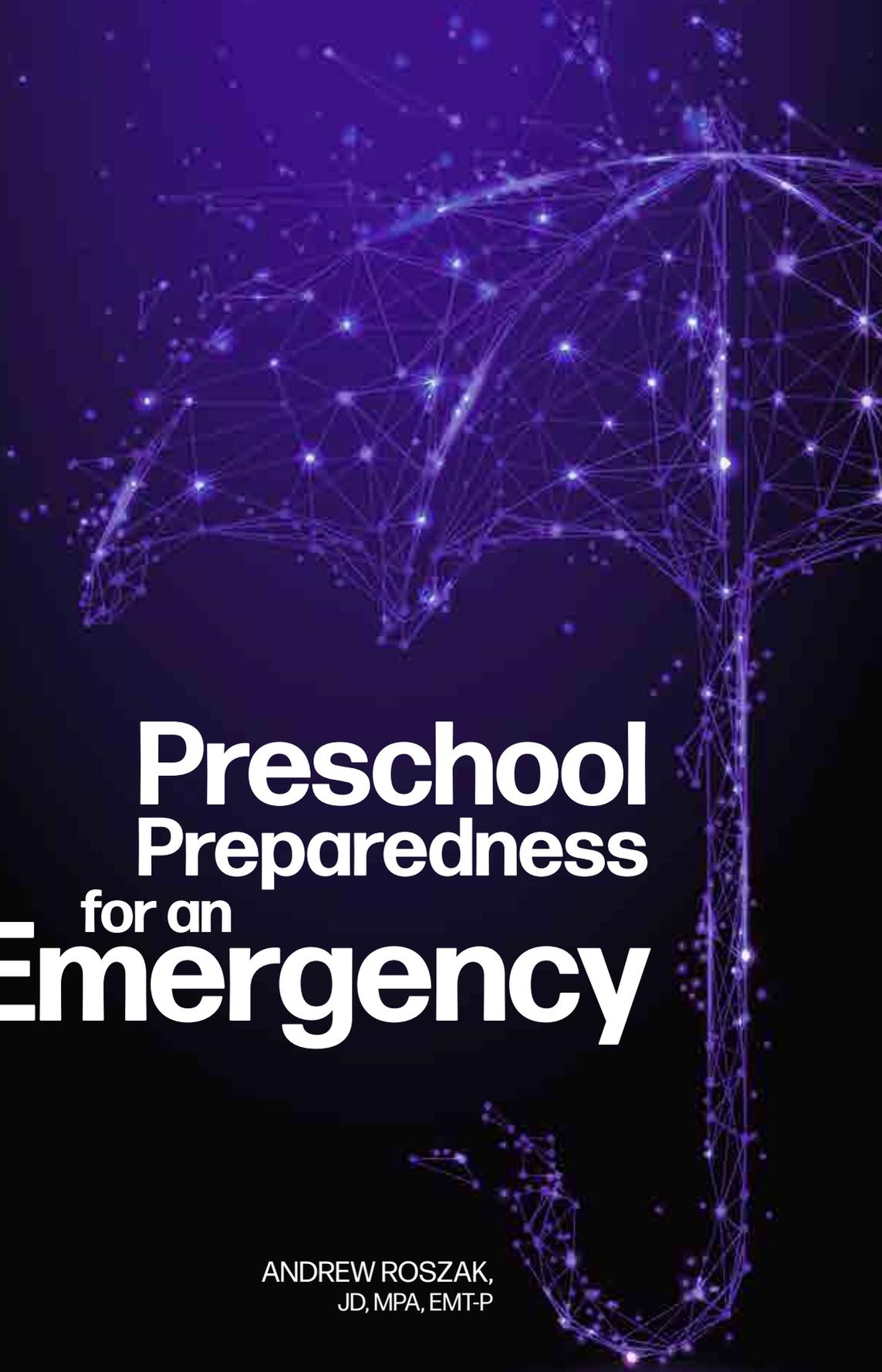


PREPARING FOR THE UNEXPECTED

Preschool Preparedness for an Emergency

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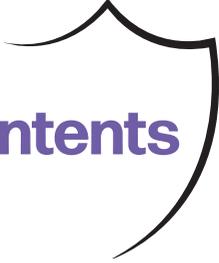


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Acknowledgments

This is the second book in the Preparing for the Unexpected series. During the course of writing this book, Mother Nature again reinforced the value of this series. Beginning in December 2019, Puerto Rico began to experience a series of earthquakes. These tremors (*terremotos* in Spanish) continued to plague the island for more than a month. In January 2020, I was with our team in Puerto Rico working with early childhood programs. In one week alone, there were more than 487 earthquakes. The situation was dire, with many people sleeping outside in tents out of fear that the next quake would cause their homes to collapse.

Neighborhoods banded together and developed tent cities that served as little communities. In these tent cities, people shared resources, swapped stories, and found compassion. Not surprisingly, many of the tent communities formed near or even on property used for early childhood programming. In Guánica, for example, families sought shelter in tents directly behind the playground used for Head Start. In Peñuelas, a tent city arose next to the Head Start building. The images paint a picture worth reflecting on, and one I hope this book helps to underscore: *early childhood education is a vital component of the community.*

While the weeks and tremors came and went, early childhood professionals rose to the task. Teachers could no longer teach in their programs, as many buildings were damaged and shut down for safety reasons or condemned. Instead of sitting idle, these extraordinary individuals packed up their teaching supplies and began providing services to the children living in the tent communities. Others took it upon themselves to go out and visit children at their homes—taking time to ensure the family was well fed and stocked with supplies.

Their dedication allowed for a small sense of normalcy to return. Children were able to continue learning, and families gladly welcomed familiar faces. It is hard to put into words, but hopefully this story illustrates to



some small degree the passion, dedication, and importance of the early childhood workforce. The following pages are dedicated to those professionals who get up every day and selflessly provide their care and compassion to help educate our children. I hope the contents of this publication provide you with the tools, resources, and knowledge you need to make your program more prepared and resilient.

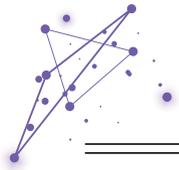
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Childhood Preparedness at a Glance



Caring for children is not an easy task. Every day in the United States, an estimated two million early childhood professionals care for approximately ten million children under the age of five, according to the *Early Childhood Workforce Index 2018* (Whitebook et al., 2018). In addition, the National Center for Education Statistics (2019) states that 56.6 million students attended elementary, middle, and high schools during fall 2019. Children under the age of eighteen make up nearly 25 percent of the US population, and each day approximately seventy million children spend the majority of their waking hours away from their families in child care, school, or after-school programs.

While much attention and many resources have been developed to assist principals and administrators serving K–12 educational institutions in emergency preparedness, relatively few resources exist to aid early childhood professionals. The lack of available resources on this topic for early childhood programs is one of the many reasons for this publication.

The simple fact is that early childhood education is of paramount importance. Children spend vastly more time at early childhood programs than they do in programs that serve older children. In comparison to the hours spent in K–12 settings, children spend ten times more hours in early childhood programs. During their most formative years, millions of children under the age of five spend thousands of hours per year in a paid child-care setting (Stevens, 2017).

Early childhood programs include infants who are entirely dependent on others to toddlers who can engage in activities and learning. Prekindergarten is the next step in children’s lives, setting them up for a classroom environment in kindergarten. The impact on a child’s development largely comes from early childhood learning environments (Stevens, 2017).

On average, children spend about thirty-six hours a week in child care. This reality places a tremendous responsibility on early childhood professionals,

especially since the occurrence of disasters is on the rise. From 2016 to 2018, on average there were fifteen disasters each year that were billion-dollar crises. In comparison, from 1980 to 2018 the average was just 6.2 events per year (Eschner, 2019; Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA], 2019). In addition to ensuring that children have a nurturing and educational environment, we must also ensure that we are providing a safe environment.

The challenges of providing a safe environment are compounded by children's unique physical, emotional, and developmental needs, such as need for routine, reliance on adults, opportunity to expend energy by playing outdoors, and emergence of self-awareness and awareness of emotion-eliciting events. Because of these needs, the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) classifies children as an at-risk population. Simply put, we must be prepared to protect those who are unable to prepare and protect themselves.

Changing societal norms have also increased the prominence and importance of the early childhood workforce. Around forty years ago, less than half of all mothers worked outside of the home, and only a third of mothers with a child under age three worked outside of the home. In contrast, 65.1 percent of mothers with children under the age of six were in the labor force in 2018 (US Department of Labor, Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020).

Even with these shifting demographics and roles of parents, a recent study found that 35 percent of households in the United States were not familiar with their school's evacuation and emergency plans, and 41 percent were unaware where their children would be evacuated to in the case of a disaster (Schlegelmilch, 2018). Sadly, early childhood is not immune to emergencies and disasters, and we have also struggled to articulate the importance of preparing for disasters for our most vulnerable children aged birth to five years. Further, federal funding to support emergency preparedness and improving children's safety has lagged far behind. An examination of federal preparedness funding from 2004–2012 revealed that federal emergency-preparedness grants that support children's safety equal less than one cent of every ten dollars invested (Save the Children, 2015).

There is a clear need to ensure early childhood programs are prepared for emergencies. But, after every disaster, we see systemic failures that point to the need to further improve policies and procedures for children. These failures occur partly because of our misconceptions around the abilities, capabilities, and limitations of emergency responders. As we have become more reliant on technology and on-demand services, our expectations have changed. A recent study revealed that 51 percent of Americans believe that, during a disaster, help will arrive in less than sixty minutes (Petkova et al., 2016). This finding highlights the disconnect between expectations and reality during a disaster. Contrary to public perception, during a disaster or large-scale emergency, help will not be available for a prolonged time— likely measured in hours, not minutes.



This reality underscores the importance of emergency-preparedness planning for early childhood programs. These plans are necessary because we are very likely to be on our own during the initial stages of a disaster. It is incumbent on us to prepare for these types of situations, and that means ensuring we are self-sufficient for up to seventy-two hours. Preplanning allows us to think through these issues. Purchasing food, water, and supplies is a wise investment and one that may prove extremely useful in a disaster.

It is incumbent on us to prepare for emergency situations, and that means ensuring we are self-sufficient for up to seventy-two hours.

Some recent examples highlight the impact disasters can have on the child-care sector:

- In October 2010, Superstorm Sandy caused the long-term closure of 697 child-care programs in Connecticut, New Jersey, and New York. Some programs were closed for up to eight months before reopening. Many of the programs suffered financial hardships beyond just the physical damages. When reopening, some early childhood programs found that the children they served before the storm did not return; they had either moved away or sought care elsewhere (Murrin, 2015).
- The Louisiana flooding in 2016 impacted at least eighty-eight child-care programs in the Baton Rouge area, displacing more than 6,000 children from their child-care programs. A month later, forty-five programs remained closed (Roszak, 2017).
- During Hurricane Matthew in 2016, more than a quarter of the child-care providers in Cumberland County, North Carolina, closed, leaving an estimated 10,200 children temporarily without child care (Roszak, 2017).
- In October 2018, Hurricane Michael interrupted 417 early childhood programs in Georgia. These programs cared for an estimated 16,680 children. More than three hundred programs closed for at least one day. Loss of water and/or power was cited as the number one reason for the closure (Institute for Childhood Preparedness, 2019a).
- In 2020, nearly half of child-care centers shut down because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Of the facilities that remained open, 85 percent operated at less than 50 percent enrollment capacity, with many operating at less than 25 percent capacity (Guynn, 2020).

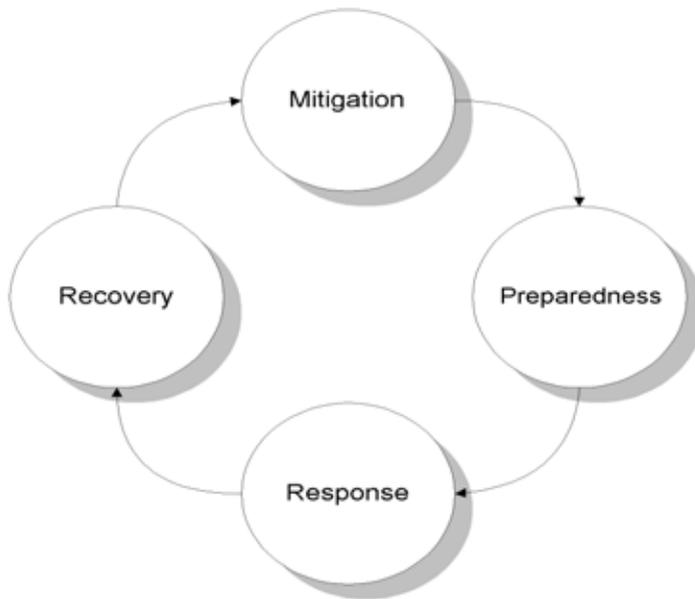
All of these disasters impacted the child-care providers and also exacted a tremendous toll on children, families, employers, and the communities at large.

Throughout the following pages, you will find information designed to help increase your emergency-preparedness knowledge. Real-world events and case studies will provide a backdrop to help further explore and understand these issues. The ultimate goal is to provide you with the knowledge and the resources needed to ensure that your early childhood program is prepared.



Defining Emergency Preparedness

Emergency preparedness is an ongoing cycle of cycle of mitigation, preparation, and recovery.



(FEMA, 2013)

Mitigation efforts seek to reduce potential harm or loss from emergencies or disasters. Mitigation activities are done in advance and involve conducting activities to lower risk. For example, a city may enact building codes to reduce the effects of high winds or floods on buildings. By enacting these codes, the city is seeking to reduce the potential losses that may be incurred from a disaster. Another example of mitigation is purchasing insurance. Insurance may not reduce losses, but it will help a facility bounce back more quickly when an emergency occurs.

Preparation involves the development and testing of emergency action plans. Preparedness is a continuing commitment, which requires monetary investment. Organizations should not view preparedness as complete once the plan is written. Instead, they should test the plan and then reevaluate whether or not the plan is sufficient or needs revisions. Other examples of preparedness include stockpiling food and water.

Response occurs when an emergency or disaster begins. It requires us to take action to protect lives and property. During a response, our investments in planning and training are put to the test. This is game day; this is go time. Organizations that have invested in their mitigation and preparedness efforts will have responses that are effective and efficient. This limits damage and loss of life and allows us to move past the emergency in a more expeditious manner.



Recovery occurs after the immediate threat to life and property has ended. Recovery involves picking up the pieces and attempting to return to normal. Recovery can be a long road; for some communities, it may take years to fully recover. Recovery often involves both short- and long-term efforts. For example, establishing a shelter to meet the needs of displaced individuals is a short-term recovery goal. A long-term recovery goal would be rebuilding homes destroyed by the disaster. Each recovery effort seeks to bring stability to the impacted community (FEMA, 2011).

Mitigation, preparation, response, and recovery work together to help increase preparedness and limit loss. Through incorporating these principles we can seek to:

- limit the amount of time our businesses are closed.
- reduce financial impacts through purchasing insurance.
- reduce the likelihood that we are impacted by making changes to our buildings.
- develop systems that allow us to respond quickly.
- increase staff self-confidence by ensuring everyone understands our plans and is empowered to act.
- satisfy licensing and other regulatory requirements.
- make the families we serve more prepared and convey our commitment to safety.
- develop meaningful relationships with local emergency-response organizations to ensure they recognize the vital role we play in the community's economy.





Plan, Prepare, Respond, and Recover.

Storms, flooding, earthquakes, epidemics, tornadoes, fire. You hope it never happens, but you know you need to be ready. *Preschool Preparedness for an Emergency*, the second book in the Preparing for the Unexpected Series, will train you for a worst-case scenario.

While this may seem like a daunting task, it's easier when you break it down. In very approachable, bite-sized pieces, emergency-preparedness expert Andrew Roszak, JD, MPA, EMT-P, will teach you how to:

- reduce potential harm or damage
- develop and test emergency action plans
- empower staff to respond effectively
- satisfy licensing and other regulatory requirements
- make families more prepared
- act quickly to protect lives and property
- develop relationships with local emergency-response organizations
- limit the amount of time your business is closed
- pick up the pieces and return to normal

You can't stop a disaster from happening, especially when Mother Nature is the force behind it. But, you can prepare yourself and your school to be ready to act when it does.


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