



School Safety and Security

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Family Reunification

Separation from one's family during or after an emergency can have mental and physical effects on children. The faster children reunite with the people they know and love, the better the outcomes will be. Reunification is the process of ensuring children return to the care of their parents and families as quickly, efficiently and carefully as possible following an emergency.

- In the U.S. 69 million children are separated from their parents and caregivers every work day to attend school or receive care in childcare facilities.
- Shelter-in-place drills help students and staff practice staying safe in the event of a potential emergency.
- School crisis response plans include reunification of students with their caregivers, since they are accountable for the chain of custody of every student during and after a crisis.
- Emergency contact cards need to be up-to-date, accurate and kept organized by each class, with hard copy backups of family member's contact and custodial restrictions information.
- The process of notification is important to notify caregivers that their children have been evacuated and need to be picked up at a pre-identified reunification site, different processes include reverse 9-1-1, telephone, text notifications or social media accounts.
- For children with special health needs, the American Academy of Pediatrics developed an emergency information form that includes health information and medications, considerations for care.
<http://www.emergencycareforyou.org/globalassets/ecy/media/pdf/eif-form.pdf>
- In an emergency, schools establish a safe area and process for parents to reunite with their children; this protocol is described in the Family Reunification Annex of local school Emergency Operations Plans.
- The release process will include the use of emergency cards to match children with caregivers. This should be practiced regularly.
- Until families are reunited after an emergency, it is important to stay informed of warnings and updates. Local and school authorities will share safety instructions and updates on TV, radio or social media. In these cases, wait to travel until the school authorities say it is safe to pick up your children.
- Here are planning resources for schools:
 - **Reunification following School Evacuation:** Guidelines for Administrators and Crisis Response Teams Web Page produced by National Association of School Psychologists
<https://www.nasponline.org/resources-and-publications/resources/school-safety-and-crisis/reunification/reunification-guidelines-for-administrators-and-crisis-response-teams>
 - **U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Family Reunification**
<https://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/reunification.html>



For more information on the bulletin topic, please contact the MEMA Public Information Officer Susan Faloon at susan.faloon@maine.gov