# Introducing Emergencies: primary

Introduce primary children to the concept of emergencies and preparedness.

Start the learning journey with activities which help children understand what an emergency is, build their knowledge and develop skills that will help them be better prepared for emergencies in the future.

**Age range:** 5–11 years old

**Curriculum links:** Primary,PSHE, Geography

### Learning objectives:

By the end of these activities children will understand:

* what an emergency is
* the way an emergency situation can develop in a range of different settings
* why and how people around the world prepare for emergencies
* how they, and their family, can be better prepared for an emergency in the home or at school

## Starter: What is an emergency?  (15 minutes)

This activity is a photo sort for groups of 3–6 children. The photos can be downloaded for printing [here](https://www.redcross.org.uk/-/media/documents/get-involved/introducing-emergencies-primary-venn-diagram-emergency-sort.pdf).

**1.** Ask children to create a large Venn diagram (two overlapping circles) on the table or floor using string, wool or two hoops.

**2.**Explain that they will divide photos into “emergency” and “not an emergency”, based on what they think from the photos. The overlapping area is for photos that they are not sure about. [This activity could be done on an interactive whiteboard by dragging and dropping photos into a Venn diagram, using volunteer children in a whole group setting]

**3.** Once they have sorted their images, ask children these questions:

* Looking at the photos, what is it that makes them an emergency or not?
* What might turn a non-emergency into an emergency?

Use their responses to build a list of words that could be used to describe an emergency. Save these so that they can be displayed during the next activities.  
  
[Extension: Ask children to think about what is not in the photo (just out of shot), or that might be about to happen. Would this change where they placed the photo?]  
  
To help you clarify children’s ideas and learning you could use the definition below:

**"A personal emergency is when an event causes some kind of risk to someone's health or welfare and which cannot be dealt with using normal available resources."** from [Emergency Bingo](https://www.redcross.org.uk/get-involved/teaching-resources/emergency-bingo).

You could use this to help clarify their ideas, or read it out and display it and compare it to their ideas as part of the activity. The following may help in using the definition:

**personal emergency**– affecting an individual

**event**– could be anything (link back to events depicted in the photos)

**risk**– danger or potential danger

**health** – the immediate condition of a person (breathing, injuries, etc.)

**welfare** – the basic needs of people (food, water, shelter, access to medicine etc.)

**normal available resources**– without these you would need help from someone, or somewhere, else.

*[Extension: To build literacy children could look for words associated with emergency such as disaster, crisis, urgent, danger, catastrophe etc. Using dictionaries to find these words and reading them out, they can deepen their understanding of an emergency.*

*They could use their new understanding to write their own definition of an ‘emergency’.]*

## Knowledge building: when things change from fun to serious (20–25 minutes)

**4.** Share the phrase **“it will end in tears”** somewhere in the room. Ask children if they have ever heard anyone say it and why[it is often used by adults when children are getting excited in particular situations]. Explain that fun can sometimes turn serious if something happens.

In their groups, ask children to share examples of when having fun has turned more serious. Give them a few minutes and ask them to have an example ready to share.

**5.** Ask each group to share their chosen example with the whole group. Alternatively, you could do this by jig-sawing. This is where one child from each group takes their example to the next group. They share it and then move on until each group has heard each example.

Should children need support here are some examples to aid their thinking:

* on a bouncy castle, when a child gets hurt
* when you run fast on the playground, but fall and take the skin off your knee
* when you play in the snow and don’t notice how cold you are getting. Suddenly your hands are red and ache because you have become too cold
* playing along a river bank and then slip into the river
* enjoying a day in the country when a bad storm suddenly arrives.

## Understanding risk: what makes a situation serious or unsafe? (10 minutes)

**6.** When they have shared their ideas focus the discussion on the question **“What makes a situation serious?”** Refer back to their earlier examples to support this.  
  
**7.** Use their discussion to try and draw up a list of common ideas/themes/characteristics that make a situation unsafe or serious. Try and turn the list into positive tips to avoid a situation becoming serious or unsafe. Would their tips only work for one example, or could they work in most situations?

## Taking action: why and how do we prepare for emergencies? (20 minutes)

**8.** Ask the children what kind of emergencies they know about and how they would respond to them? [Be aware that his could be a sensitive area for some children if they have recent or dramatic first-hand experience.]Have they been involved in preparing for a possible emergency? What did that involve?

[This might depend on the area - for example the area may suffer from extreme cold or flooding].   
  
**9.** Mention the fire drill, which must be done by law. Share with children why a fire is an emergency (refer back to earlier parts of the activity) and why it is serious. Work through what would happen if there was a fire.   
  
**10.** Introduce children to a range of disaster and emergency situations. These could include flooding, earthquakes, landslides, wildfires, volcanoes, tsunamis, hurricanes etc. Explain that people living in parts of the world where these are a high risk, prepare for such disasters just as we might with a fire drill.  
  
**11.**Explain to children that in their groups they will be given an ‘Emergency Card’ to investigate a particular emergency elsewhere in the world. [There are three emergency cards to download[*here*](https://www.redcross.org.uk/-/media/documents/get-involved/introducing-emergencies-primary-emergency-cards.pdf) with each divided into parts A and B.] Here are the guidelines for using the cards:

**a.** Give out part A of the Emergency Cards with each group having a different card *[you can use two sets of cards for larger groups]*. Ask children to study the emergency card and talk about their emergency situation. Why is it an emergency? How is it serious?

**b.** Ask a group member to record *[on a piece of paper or mini-whiteboard]*how their group might prepare and respond to the emergency on their card.

**c.** Now give out part B of the emergency card to each group. This part shares how people at risk prepare and respond to those emergencies. Ask children to compare their ideas to those on the card. How were their ideas similar or different? Was there anything that surprised them?

[Extension: Building on children’s response to 7 above, work as a whole group to share the emergencies and identify common guidelines, but also things to do in a specific emergency. Help them to understand that it is important not to mix these up. For example, staying calm is always good, but that whilst you might need to run in response to a tsunami, you would not run when leaving a building due to a fire.]

## Taking action: Preparing for an emergency (20 minutes)

**12.** Look together at the [wildfires diagram](http://www.cdc.gov/phpr/documents/BeReady_Widfires.pdf) from the USA. Ask children: Is this useful? Why? [They should pick up that it shows how to prepare for a wildfire emergency.]

**13.** Ask children to think about their own setting (school/playgroup etc) and to make a plan for how they would prepare for a fire. This could be done just for the room they are in, or different groups could do different rooms to make a plan for the whole building. The plan should include:

* what children should do if they discover a fire;
* a diagram (map) of the room/building that shows safe routes out of the building;
* information about where they should go once out of the room;
* the role that adults (teachers/carers) should take;
* who to inform/contact.
* You may also wish to mark on the position of smoke detectors, fire alarms, and fire extinguishers.

**14.** Explain that making a plan for the building is only part of preparing for an emergency. It is also important to prepare ourselves.

Ask the children to finish by drawing an outline of a person on a piece of paper. In groups ask them to write inside the person, words and phrases about preparing ourselves for an emergency.

The list below can be used to check this learning:

      stay calm   don’t panic       make yourself safe     alert others

      get help      talk clearly       listen to instructions     help others if safe

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## Homework Activity

Children can create a fire plan for their own home.

### Credits

This resource was written by Rob Bowden and Rosie Wilson of Lifeworlds Learning and published in September 2014.