Why prepare for the unexpected?
Planning for the unexpected can help families deal efficiently with emergencies. No one can think of everything, but it helps to plan ahead. This activity gives family members the chance to share their skills and build confidence about dealing with emergencies and other unplanned situations.

What do we need?
varies with the demonstrated skill

How long will it take?
1 hour

What do we do?
Choose someone to demonstrate a new skill. The whole family can help choose a topic for the demonstration. See the list of suggestions below. The possibilities are endless!

Suggested How-tos
• Social skills
  – how to answer the phone and take a message
  – how to write and mail a letter or thank-you note
  – how to order in a restaurant
  – how to behave when visiting an elderly relative
  – how to treat guests
• Safety and survival skills
  – how to escape a home fire
  – how to take cover when a tornado or earthquake threatens
  – how to phone the fire department, police, ambulance, and poison center
  – how to perform basic first aid
  – how to perform the Heimlich maneuver when someone is choking
  – what to do if a stranger approaches
- how to answer the door if a stranger knocks
- what to do if you get lost
- how to lock and unlock doors
- who to call if you’re home alone and need help
- what to do if the power goes out

• Car maintenance
  - how to fill the car with gas
  - how to check the oil and tire pressure
  - how to change a flat tire
  - how to handle a breakdown on the road

• Household maintenance
  - how to prepare a meal
  - how to use kitchen appliances
  - how to prepare for a family shopping trip
  - how to shovel snow
  - how to mow a lawn
  - how to operate the washer and dryer and sort and fold laundry
  - how to operate a machine in a laundromat
  - how to wash dishes
  - how to sew on a button or mend clothing
  - how to do simple home repairs
  - how to care for pets

• Financial skills
  - how to count change
  - how to write and endorse a check
  - how to balance a checkbook
  - how to read a bank statement and savings book
  - how to use a credit card
  - how to pay a bill

Set a time when everyone can participate. The “teacher” should explain the new skill and its importance and then show everyone how to do it.
Sample “How-tos”

T How to escape a house fire
Teach family members what to do if your house catches fire. Each person should know two exits from each room. Designate a special place outside the house as a meeting place for everyone to come to after they have escaped. Never stop to call the fire department from inside the house; call from a neighbor’s house instead. Once outside, don’t go back in—not for anything or anyone. It is the firefighters’ job to get people out.

If a fire occurs at night, yell to warn other family members. Feel the wooden part of the door (not the knob) with the back of your hand before you open it. If it is hot, go out another way. If it is cool, put your foot close to the door and open it slightly if smoke or heat comes in, close the door quickly and go out another way.

Open windows to escape. Don’t break them unless you can’t get them open. Practice to be sure you can open the window and screen on your own. If you can’t get out a door or window, stuff something in the crack under the door. Go to the window and yell. Hang a blanket or piece of clothing out of the window as a signal. Don’t open the window more than 2 inches. This amount of space will let you breathe but won’t let a lot of smoke in. Keep below the smoke or fumes when leaving the house. Meet your family in the special meeting place so you know everyone got out.

T How to phone the fire department, police, ambulance, or poison center
Decide whether you will call 911 for all emergencies or use a different number depending on the emergency. Make a list of these numbers and tape it near each phone in your home. Make sure each phone has your phone number on it. It’s easy to forget the number in an emergency.

Call the emergency number and give the following information.
State the problem. “There’s a fire at my house.” Or “My sister cut her arm and I can’t stop the bleeding.”
State your first and last name. “My name is Timmy White.”
State your complete address, including the apartment number and city. “I live at 1001 South Chester, Apartment 3, Chicago.”
State your nearest cross street. “That’s close to Elm and 38th Street.” If you are in the country, use the official road numbers, not informal names of roads: “That’s close to N2000 and W1800.”
State the number you are calling from. “I’m calling from 384-2323.”
Tell children to stay on the phone and follow directions until the emergency person says to hang up.
What to do if a stranger approaches

Teach children to always walk with friends and stay on busy, well-lit streets. If someone follows them, they should go to a store, school, or a friend’s house and ask for help. If a stranger asks your child a question, decide on one of two responses. The first is to say nothing and keep walking. Many law enforcement officials prefer this approach because there is less risk the adult will gain control over the child. The second response is to tell the person you aren’t allowed to talk to strangers and keep walking. Children should never go with someone or even go near them unless their parents say it is okay. This is true even if children know the person.

If a stranger knocks and children are at home without a parent or grownup, they should never open the door. They should ask “Who is it?” through the closed door, looking through the peephole or through the door window. Teach them to take a message and to tell the person that someone will call back.

Delivery people should be told to leave the package outside or give it to a neighbor. If they need a signature, they should be sent next door or told to leave their number and that someone will call them. A person who is giving away samples can leave them outside. A person who needs to report an emergency should be told to go next door or children can offer to call 911 for her. Do not let the person in. If someone has come to make a repair, tell the person to leave a number and someone will call to reschedule. If the person looks like a police officer or firefighter, call the operator (dial 0) and ask to be connected with the police or fire department. Ask if they sent the person to your house. If they did, you can let them in.

Make sure everyone gets a chance to practice the skill. Role playing is a good way to practice.

After the demonstration, serve refreshments. Then decide who will be in charge of the next “how-to” night and what that person will demonstrate. Family members should keep practicing the skills until they have mastered them.
Option. Assemble a "communication center." You'll need:
- a large bulletin board or big piece of cardboard
- a calendar with lots of space for writing
- paper, pens, thumb tacks, and string
- small spiral-bound stenographer's pad or similar notebook

Divide the bulletin board into three sections with the string. The first section is for messages. Remove the cover from the notepad and attach the back cover to the bulletin board. Wrap or tape a piece of string around one end of a pen or pencil and attach the other end of the string permanently to the bulletin board. Now you'll have paper and pencil handy to jot down messages. Tear them off the pad and attach them to the bulletin board or refrigerator.

The second section is for important phone numbers. Have family members make a list of important phone numbers to post on the bulletin board. Include emergency services (such as police and fire departments, ambulance service, and poison control centers), doctors and dentists, parents' work numbers, veterinarians, family friends' numbers, out-of-town relatives, and other important people.

The third section is for schedules. Attach the calendar to the bulletin board so family members can keep track of birthdays, meetings, trips, appointments, and other important dates.

What happened?
- Which situation or skill did you practice?
- Has everyone in the family mastered the skill?

What did you learn?
- How do you think you would react in an emergency if you had rehearsed the situation beforehand?
- How do you think you'd handle an emergency if you hadn't thought about it beforehand?

Why was this activity important?
- Why was it important to learn the skill you worked on today?
- Why is it important to think some situations through before they occur?

What's next?
- What other situations should you rehearse in your mind? Or with your family?
- How often do you think you should practice what you learned today in order to keep it fresh in your mind?
- If younger family members haven't quite mastered this skill, how can you help them practice?