

Emergency/Disaster

When Disaster Strikes

Over four million Canadians have been forced from their homes by natural disasters resulting in billions of dollars in property damage. It may seem a distant possibility; yet natural disasters, technological emergencies, environmental incidents, and human caused disasters can disrupt services and leave your family unprepared with serious consequences. It can happen to you and your family. A hazardous material leakage could mean evacuation, and a winter snow

storm could strand you at home. Major disasters could disrupt water, electricity, gas delivery, telephone and internet services for hours or days. There are municipal disaster plans in place with volunteers, emergency medical services, firefighters and police ready and prepared to take action to protect the community. But in the initial moments and hours following a disaster it remains up to you to protect your family.



Photo courtesy of the Canadian Red Cross



Disaster Supplies Kit

The Red Cross recommends that you stock your home with six basic supplies to meet the needs of your family for at least three days:

1. Water
2. Food
3. First Aid Supplies
4. Tools/Emergency supplies
5. Clothing and bedding
6. Special items
(baby, adult, documents, etc.)

These items may be required for evacuation, or for sustaining your family if isolated in or near your home. The supplies should be assembled in advance, with all food items being replaced annually, and water being replaced every six months. Supplies should be stored in easy-to-carry containers such as backpacks, duffle bags, or covered containers with handles. Further information can be found at Red Cross and Government of Canada Web sites. See box on opposite page.

Are you ready?

Discuss with your family members why preparing for a disaster is important and what types of disasters are more likely to happen in the area. Teach your family members age and stage appropriate information that will assist them to stay safe even in your absence. Family members can take on different responsibilities to ensure that when time is short, they work together as a team to keep themselves and their home safe. For example, knowing where the emergency shut off valves are for water, electricity and gas can help minimize damage in case of certain disasters. Placing easy-to see labels

with instructions near the breaker panel, water main and gas valve can save time and property. Gas should only be turned off if directed to do so by emergency officials, but you can turn off heat and hot water pilot lights if necessary. Use your Emergency Escape plan to practice exiting your home in case of disaster. (See box.)

The basic rule is simple and effective: Be Prepared. Knowing what to do ahead of time can help your family remain calm, confident and connected. A few simple steps can protect your family from the confusion and

uncertainty caused by disaster. It is important to know what to do before disaster strikes, as power and communication services are often disrupted, or overloaded in a disaster. You may not be able to call for help or access information when you need it most. The Red Cross and government websites have an abundance of information, checklists and procedures to follow in preparing for the possibility of disaster. These Web sites (see box) are easy to access, with printer friendly checklists and simple guidelines.



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Preparedness

Disasters that could occur in your area

Disasters are unpredictable and life-altering. Some disasters are more likely to occur in some regions of the country and not in others. In the Calgary region there are a number of likely natural, environmental and human-caused disasters that could occur. Each type of disaster brings danger with it, but there are safety precautions you can take now, in your own home to minimize the damage.

Winter storms, power failures, flooding of low lying areas, being down wind from a chemical plant incident, are a few examples that could result in the evacuation of residents in Calgary. Often people aren't prepared for evacuation notices. They may have to be leave home for 24 hours, or for a week. Every situation is different.

In case of winter storm or power failure, ensure you have the following items and take the necessary precautions:

- Flashlight
- Extra batteries
- Battery or crank powered radio
- Turn the thermostat down to a minimum.
- Turn off all appliances, and electronics to prevent injury, or to prevent damage to equipment.
- Power can be more easily restored if the system isn't overloaded with demand for power.
- If using candles, use proper candle holders, place candles in a well ventilated, clear area away from combustible items. Never leave candles unattended.
- Do not use gas or charcoal barbecues indoors.
- Do not use camping equipment, including heating equipment indoors.
- Do not use home generators indoors.
- Ensure generators are placed outdoors, in well-ventilated areas, well away from windows and doors.
- Only use properly rated extension cords.



Emergency Escape Plan

- Draw a floor plan of your home, identify two escape routes from each room, follow your emergency fire escape plan (*See Family Escape Plan under Fire Safety).
- Establish a safe place in your area for your family to meet at in case of emergency.
- Locate nearby your home where family members can gather if escaping the home due to an emergency.
- Designate a meeting place away from your neighborhood in case you can't return home, or you have to be evacuated. Ensure everyone knows the address and phone number of this location.
- Keep family records in water and fire-proof containers – use a safety deposit box if possible to keep irreplaceable records.
- Discuss what to do as a family in case of disaster, emergencies, power outages, lightning, hail, and sever snowstorms.
- Keep a disaster/emergency survival kit in your home: a blanket, flashlight and batteries, radio and batteries (or hand-crank radio), candles, waterproof matches, food and water, medications and bandages would be a good start. For more specific information on what to prepare in a survival kit see the websites listed.
- Be pre-emptive by taking a Basic First Aid and CPR training course.

Websites

The City of Calgary Web site:
www.calgary.ca
 and follow links to
 Emergency Planning and Disaster,
 or call 268-CITY(2489).

Red Cross Web site:
www.redcross.ca

Government of Canada Web site:
www.gov.ca
 and follow links to Disaster Planning



Photo courtesy of the Canadian Red Cross



Alberta has the highest rate of reported spousal abuse in Canada. In 2002 the Calgary Police Service responded to 11,300 reports of domestic violence and in half of those cases children witnessed the assault. It is believed that many more incidents than this occur, but the individuals are too intimidated, fearful and ashamed to call for help.

Domestic violence affects the whole family; it is not just a crime between adults. More than 378,000 children in Canada between the ages of six and eleven have witnessed violence in the home at some point in their lives. These children are at an increased risk of behavioral and developmental problems and are at even greater risk of becoming victims of violence, or perpetrators of violence themselves.

Domestic violence is one of the leading causes of injury to women. However in at least ten percent of reported incidents the victims were men.

Seniors are also victims of abuse. The Kerby Centre has an outreach program and a shelter to support abused seniors in finding safety from an abuser. It is often more difficult for seniors to leave an abusive relationship as they are reliant on the caregiver. The Kerby Rotary Shelter provides an information and referral line to provide assistance, the number is listed at the end of the article.

“The high rate of reported cases of abuse in Alberta may speak to the fact that we’ve done a lot of work that allows individuals who have been impacted by violence to access services safely,” said Karen Walroth, Coordinator of the Action Committee Against Violence (ACAV).

Domestic

What is abuse?

Abuse refers to all forms of behavior in which one human being is trying to achieve/maintain control or power over another.

improve earnings; forcing partner to account for and/or hand over money; monopoly of financial decision-making.

Emotional and Psychological Abuse

Constant criticisms, put downs, threats to hurt or kill a partner, children or pets; jealousy, denying the opportunity for friendships; controlling; withdrawing; intimidation; denying spiritual activities.

Physical Abuse

Pinching; shoving; slapping; punching; kicking; grabbing; shaking; hair pulling.

Sexual Abuse

Deprivation of sexual intimacy as a means of control; forced sex; forced sex with friends; objects; forced exposure to pornography and insisting partner act out pornographic fantasies.

Financial Abuse

Allowing a partner little or no money and no opportunity to

How can persons impacted by violence help themselves and their families?

Individuals who have been impacted by violence are not responsible for their abuse. There are steps that abused persons can take to increase their safety and the safety of their children. The most



dangerous time for a person living in an abusive situation is when they have made the decision to leave or shortly after leaving, therefore is essential to contact a shelter to make a safety plan.

Because of the secrecy, shame and fear felt by the person being abused, very few report their abuse. The secrecy allows the abuser to continue and stops the abuser from being held accountable for their actions. The abuser often blames the victims for the abuse and because there are no witnesses outside of the home, there is no one to validate the experiences of those living under the fear of domestic violence.

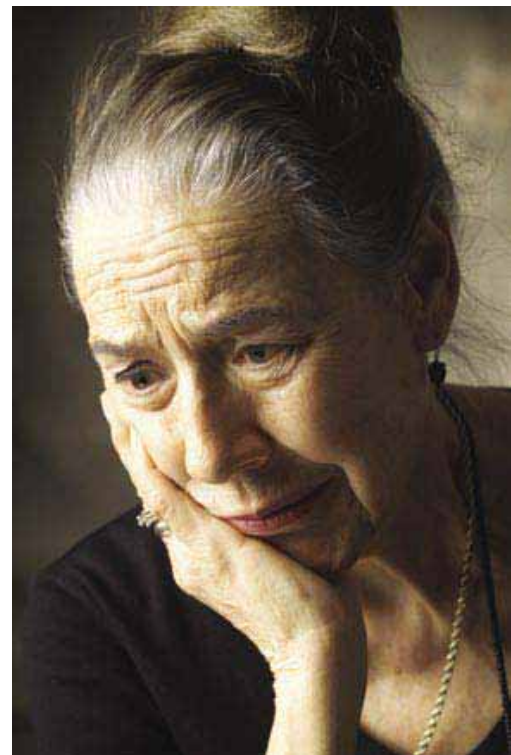
Safety Plans

Domestic violence is unpredictable and there can be no guarantee for safety. Leaving requires a cautious and realistic approach and careful planning to ensure the safety of you and your children. Whether you choose to leave or to stay in an abusive relationship, you must develop a safety plan.

You will need a safety plan:

1. If you leave,
2. After you leave.
3. If you stay.

Your Safety Plan should be reviewed with a counselor through a local women's shelter. They are skilled at assessing your situation and assisting you in considering the best options for safety. A safety plan will take into account the specific circumstances and abilities of the individual. Standard safety plans are provided at the end of this article. Please contact an emergency shelter for assistance.



Violence

Programs for children who witness domestic violence

It is critical that children who have witnessed domestic violence receive counseling. 40-75% of children living in homes where there is abuse are both witnesses and victims of violence. The traumatic impact of abuse results in physical symptoms such as headaches, stomach aches, nightmares, etc., to behavioral and personality problems such as moodiness, low frustration tolerance, poor performance in school, distractibility, and self mutilation. Children who have heard or seen physical fights between adults in their homes are more than twice as likely to be physically aggressive as those who have not witnessed violence. Children are also at risk to repeat abusive behaviors within their own intimate relationships – perpetuating violence into the next generation.

A treatment program for children who have been impacted by domestic violence can help them to learn resiliency and gain the ability to cope with traumatic experiences. Programs help children to deal with the trauma of domestic violence and assist children to develop healthy, non-violent ways of interacting and resolving conflict.

Both the parent who has experienced the abuse and the children may be at greater risk of violence after separation due to the emotional, verbal, and physical abuse or threats of abuse that can occur during this time. The Calgary Community Visitation Project responds to this increased risk by providing protective settings for the safe transfers and visitation of children with non-custodial parents during separation and divorce.



What can you do?

If you know or suspect that someone is being abused you can do something. Resources are available to assist victims in gaining the strength and courage to leave safely.

- Ask the individual if they are being abused. The abusers power is based on secrecy.
- Let them talk without judging them.
- Validate their experiences.
- Urge the abused individual to call the police, a crisis line, a shelter or a counselor.
- Help them to access the resources they will need to be safe, they may be overwhelmed by the impact of abuse.
- Call a shelter to find out what resources are available for the individual and what you can do to help them.
- Do not put yourself at risk when supporting a person who has been abused.

Standard Safety Plan

For individuals leaving an Abusive Relationship or Situation

If you are planning to leave an abusive situation, you may wonder whether to tell your partner/ caregiver that you are leaving. This is a time to be cautious, telling the abuser may escalate the violence and place you and your children in serious danger.

1. If possible, preprogram emergency numbers into your phone (911, etc.)
2. Have a list of shelters and phone numbers accessible, but hidden safely.
3. When using the phone to contact a shelter or other domestic violence resources, dial another 'safe' number immediately afterwards so that the abusive person cannot redial to check your activities. When using the internet to access domestic violence resources, learn how to delete the web history.
4. Have a list of options for safe places (motel, emergency shelters). Call ahead to see if there is space available at the shelter for you and your children. If required, check to

see if the shelters are barrier-free for your needs.

5. Do not go to a friend or relatives if the person abusing you is likely to find you there. This can be dangerous for you and those trying to assist you.
6. Keep a phone in a room you can lock from the inside.
7. Plan an escape route out of your home; practice it with your children.
8. Put away some money at every opportunity, even enough for a phone call.
9. If possible, hide an extra vehicle key in a safe but accessible place.
10. Gather important papers for both you and your children ahead of time and secure them in a safe place – a safety deposit box or with a trusted friend. Include:
 - birth certificates, identification
 - Alberta Health Care cards,
 - immigration and citizenship papers,
 - Important records (banking, insurance, assets, etc.).
11. Pack a suitcase of essential

items such as clothing, medicine, prescriptions, toiletries, etc., and store them in a safe and accessible place.

12. Make plans for pets; if you are unable to leave them behind safely and this hinders you from leaving explain this to the shelter when you call.
13. Make prior arrangements to ensure that some form of emergency transportation is available upon request. (through a trusted friend or community support)
14. Select a code-word that can be used on the phone with a person you trust. The code word will mean that the person is to notify the police that you are leaving.
15. Talk to your neighbors or a friend you can trust and arrange an emergency signal or code that will alert them to call the police.
16. If there is a support person who the person abusing you is not aware of, keep their address and phone number confidential.

Agencies/Services

Emergency/Police/Fire/ Ambulance	9-1-1
Requests for Police Service	266-1234
Men's Line – information and support	266-4357
(For information and support)	
Child Abuse – Emergency Social Services	297-2995
Kerby Rotary Shelter – Seniors	705-3250
Calgary Communities Against Sexual Abuse	237-5888
Sheriff King Family Violence Prevention Centre	266-4111
Senior Connect	264-7700

Shelters

Calgary Women's Emergency Shelter	232-8171
YWCA Sheriff King Home	256-0707
Native Women's Shelter	531-1972
Kerby Rotary Shelter – for seniors	705-3250

Programs for Children

Calgary Counseling Centre	265-4980
YWCA Sheriff King Home	294-3673

Programs for persons who have chosen to act abusively

Calgary Counseling Centre	265-4980
YWCA Family Violence Prevention Centre	266-4111



Fire Safety is a

The best way to keep your family safe from fire injuries is to be prepared. The Calgary Fire Department has established two injury prevention initiatives that support family awareness of risks within their own homes, and assists families to plan ahead in case of fire. *Hunt for Home Hazards* and the *Make A Family Fire Escape Plan* are simple measures parents can initiate to reduce the risk of fire in their homes and enhance the safety of their families.

In 2001, fires in Alberta claimed the lives of 42 people, injured 389 more, and caused approximately \$8,000,000 in property loss. Although only 25% of fires in Alberta happen in homes, these fires claimed nearly 64% of lives lost and caused 60% of the fire injuries. Most home fire injuries were the result of cooking

related fires, while most deaths were related to smoking. Early prevention and planning ahead is the best way to reduce risks. The Calgary Fire Department is focusing on fire prevention awareness and education as key factors in reducing fire risk and hazards in the home.

"Prevention is the best way to keep your family safe from fire. Knowing ahead of time what to do where to go and how to be safe can minimize the risk of injury and prevent tragedy," said Garth Rabel, Community Safety Coordinator, Calgary Fire Department.

Hunt for Home Hazards (See page 7) is a safety initiative that encourages families to conduct a room-by-room home inspection. A checklist of common home safety concerns is available at the

Calgary Fire Department website in a printer-friendly format. The list allows families to search for and identify potential hazards in their own homes and to take early preventative steps to reduce risk of injury. Children become more aware of hazards, and parents can better assess family safety needs by seeing the rooms from a child's point of view. Families can learn together how to protect themselves today, and in the future from preventable fire accidents.

"Prevention starts with children at a young age," said Garth. **"We hope that our awareness campaigns and focus on the family will better prepare children so that prevention will be a way of life for them – as automatic as putting on a seat belt."**

Each home has a different

combination of risks and issues that can be assessed to reduce potential injury and risk of fire in the home. The search includes looking for potential fire hazards such as frayed electrical cords, combustible items too near a heat source, and overloaded electrical outlets. Simple solutions and proper maintenance can then be implemented to reduce hazards and keep your family safe.

"Common sense, the maintenance of everything in the home and hunting for hazards on a regular basis can get the entire family involved in preventing fire," said Garth. **"Home safety is more than just a matter of fire prevention, it is an opportunity to assess risk and ensure the home environment is safe for everyone at all times."**

Hunt for Home Hazards can

become an annual event scheduled with general home maintenance.

Have your family start the hunt in the basement and move throughout the house searching for hazards from room to room. Look low to high - floor to ceiling, furnace to chimney, and basement to attic. The checklist is an invaluable tool to assist you in reviewing your home from the perspective of family safety.

"Be diligent about managing your own risk," cautions Garth. **"If there's a problem with anything in your home solve it, repair it, and maintain it following all manufacturer's instructions. If you've lost the instructions contact the manufacturer directly or call the Community Safety Division of the Calgary Fire Department."**

Family Escape Plan Checklist

Draw an evacuation plan of your home.

- Indicate each room in your home
- Indicate all windows, doors, halls and stairways.
- Indicate the Safe room.
- Indicate the outside meeting place.

Walk through your home with your family and look for the best escape routes.

- Identify two exits from each room, the normal exit and a secondary exit.
- Are all windows accessible to all family members?
- Can all family members open all windows easily?
- Can all family members open all doors easily?

Are there any obstacles to your safety?

- If possible, remove all obstacles (furniture, toys, storage) that might get in the way of your escape.
- Each night before you sleep, ensure all bedroom floors and, doors, stairs and exits are clear of any obstacles.
- Check doors to ensure they open and close easily.

- Make sure house numbers are clearly visible on the front and back of your home so that emergency crews can find you.
- Make sure basement windows can be reached by all members of the family, if necessary place furniture beneath the windows to help you get out.

Test each smoke alarm to ensure it is working.

- Is there a smoke alarm in or outside of all sleeping areas? It may be the first and only alert your family will have to get to safety.
- Check the batteries in your smoke detector.
- How old is the smoke detector. Replace the unit if it is older than ten years.
- Test the alarm with the children present so they become familiar with the sound. The alarm will be very shrill, loud and startling. It's supposed to be, it was designed to wake you in case of fire.
- Explain to children that during a real fire the alarm will activate and stay on, adding to the noise and confusion. Instruct children not to hide from the sound, or ignore it. They must respond when they hear it and follow their escape plan to safely and quickly exit the burning building.

Choose a Safe Room

Every home should have a designated 'safe room' where family members can retreat if escape isn't possible. This is especially important in a two-story home.

- Are there windows in the safe room? Can all family members easily open them?
- Is there a phone in the room? If it is a landline, replace it with a radiophone, so that your family can stay in contact with the emergency operator in case they need to retreat further away from the source of fire. If possible, make a habit of recharging your cell phone in that room so that there is a back-up phone, especially at night.
- Place duct tape in the safe room. The duct tape can be used to seal the door and stop toxic fumes and smoke from entering. Ensure that all family members know where it is stored and how to use it.
- Is there a rescue ladder? Where will it be stored? Is everyone able to lift and position the ladder? If not, are adults able to assist small children? Does it fit through the window? Does it attach securely to the window frame? If not, will it rest securely against the house?

Choose a Meeting Place

A meeting place will help all family members to congregate and be reunited quickly in case of emergency. Choose a safe place that

all family members can get to from any exit.

- Do all family members understand to GET OUT and STAY OUT?
- Do all family members understand not to go back in the home for any reason or anything?
- Do all family members know where the meeting place is and how to get there from any exit?
- Do all family members know to stay at the meeting place and wait for family members, even if some are delayed?

Get out quickly:

- Smoke and fire can overwhelm your home in as little as two minutes from the time the smoke detector first alerts you to danger, you must get out quickly!
- Drop below the smoke. Smoke is dangerous; it is extremely hot and contains toxic fumes. If your home is filled with smoke drop to your hands and knees and crawl to the nearest exit.
- Keep your head below the smoke, 1-2 feet above the ground. The smoke will rise above you.
- The air is cleanest, coolest and safest at floor level.

Touch doors to feel for heat

- If the door or doorframe is warm to the touch, the fire will be nearby, use the second way out.



Family Matter



The Family Escape Plan

Once you've completed your home inspection, it's time to retrace your steps back through the house with a new mission: create and practice a Family Fire Escape Plan. An escape plan helps families to identify two exits from every room in the house, and to choose a safe meeting place outside. The plan would also determine what to do if fire and smoke blocks the way out, and designates a 'safe room' to wait for emergency help.

This practice escape provides an opportunity to assess the effectiveness of your plan and adjust it to ensure everyone has the best chance to get out in the event of a fire. Plans can be clearly thought-out when everyone is calm and not threatened by a crisis situation.

Practicing home fire escape plans.

How would you answer these questions?

- Yes No** Does your family have a home fire escape plan that includes two exits (usually a door and a window) out of each room?
- Yes No** Are exits in your home kept free of toys, furniture, and clutter?
- Yes No** If there are infants or other family members with limited mobility, has someone been assigned to assist them in the event of a fire?
- Yes No** Does your family practice the escape plan twice a year? Why not practice it tonight?
- Yes No** Has your family picked a safe place to meet outside after you leave your home?
- Yes No** Does everyone in your family know the fire department emergency number to call once you're safely outside?
- Yes No** Is your house number clearly visible from the street?

"Families should designate one

bedroom as a 'safe' room in case they can't get out," said Garth. **"It should be equipped to assist a family or individual to 'defend in place', by having a phone to call 9-1-1, a roll of duct tape to seal the door to hold back smoke and heat and there must be a window."**

When your family is reunited but someone is missing, tell the firefighters immediately. They will want to know who is missing and where in the home they are likely to be. It is important to remember that with a practiced plan your loved ones have a better chance to survive, they will make better decisions and their actions could keep them safe. The final piece of your plan must be to stay safe outside of the burning building and wait for fire fighters to do their job. If you go in after a family member, pet or possession, it could risk your life and the life of a firefighter. Get out, stay out and never re-enter a burning building for anyone or anything.

The Calgary Fire Department Web site provides information, checklists and links to other sites to help families prevent injury. Many of these sites provide child-friendly materials so your children can learn more about home safety. Check the Calgary Fire Department Web site through www.calgary.ca, or call the Community Safety Division at 287-4296.

Hunt for Home Hazards

As a family use this list to work together to identify potential hazards in your home. If any answer is no, it is an opportunity for you to develop plans and effect changes to reduce risk to your family and property.

- Yes No** Does a grown-up always stay in the kitchen when food is cooking on the stove?
- Yes No** Are cooking areas free of materials that could catch fire?
- Yes No** Are pot handles turned towards the back of the stove?
- Yes No** Is there a "kid-free" zone of one metre (three feet) around the stove when grown-ups are cooking?
- Yes No** Are portable space heaters always turned off when grown-ups leave the room or go to sleep?
- Yes No** Has your family's heating equipment—chimneys, fireplaces, woodstoves, or furnaces—been inspected by a professional this year?
- Yes No** Are candles always blown out when grown-ups leave the room or go to bed?
- Yes No** Are candles placed in holders that won't tip over easily and are big enough to catch dripping wax safely?
- Yes No** Are matches and lighters kept in a locked cabinet, out of children's sight and reach?

- Yes No** Are electrical cords in good condition, without cracks or frayed areas?
- Yes No** Are flammable liquids like gasoline, kerosene, or propane stored in safe containers, outside the home in a properly ventilated shed or garage?
- Yes No** If there are smokers in your home, do they douse all butts and ashes with water before throwing them away?

Installing and testing smoke alarms

- Yes No** Does your home have a working smoke alarm on every floor and inside or near every sleeping area?
- Yes No** Are the batteries working in every smoke alarm? (Have a grown-up press the test button to find out. Schedule replacing batteries in every smoke alarm with day light savings time – change your batteries when you change the clocks.)
- Yes No** Do you have any smoke alarms that are more than 10 years old? If so, or if you can't remember, have a grown-up replace them.
- Yes No** Does everyone in your home know the sound of the smoke alarm and know exactly what to do if it goes off?

How To Conduct a Family Home Escape Drill

To begin:

(One adult will be designated to set the timer for two minutes and to sound the alarm.)

1. All lights are off.
2. All doors are closed.
3. Everyone is in bed, in their own bedrooms.
4. The designated adult depresses the test button on the smoke detector.

At the sound of the alarm everyone:

- Drops out of their beds onto the floor.
- Yells to awaken one another.
- Crawls to the door, or primary exit.
- Feels the door for warmth.
- Proceeds to open the door if it is cool to the touch, staying low to the ground.
- Crawls along the floor toward the nearest exit.
- Keeps yelling to awaken others
- Closes doors along the way to slow the spread of fire and smoke
- Keeps moving toward the nearest exit
- Leaves immediately
- Goes to the designated meeting place and stays there
- Stays away from the burning building!
- Asks someone to call 9-1-1

- Get out and stay out! Don't go back into the burning building for any reason or anything!

Assessing the plan:

- Did everyone get out within the two-minute time limit?
- How did everyone do? Did anyone need extra help?
- Were there problems getting out that could have resulted in delay or injury? If so, can these problems be solved now?
- Does the plan need to change?
- Is there anything else you can do now to make this plan more effective?
- Remember to practice the escape plan every 6 months.

Suicide Prevention: Reaching Out For Hope

Why should this concern you?

Suicide is a risk for individuals of all ages; no family or community is immune to it. Every year over 400 people die by suicide in Alberta. Alberta has one of the highest rates of suicide in Canada. The greatest hazard to families is that the risk of suicide is unrecognized. For every suicide that takes place at least ten other people are impacted.

Suicide is a very complex issue, there is no one reason that causes people to take their own life. Suicide is most often the result of a combination of factors, including physical, emotional, and social influences.



“Preventing suicide requires four measures: awareness, willingness to talk about it, a social connection and appropriate intervention,” said Barb Hinger, a counselor with Airdrie Family Services. **“It is characterized by intense emotional pain and a pervasive feeling of hopelessness.”**

Helping Someone Who May Be Suicidal

If someone you know:

- Threatens suicide
- Talks about wanting to die
- Shows changes in behavior, appearance or mood
- Abuses drugs and/or alcohol
- Deliberately injures themselves
- Appears depressed, sad, withdrawn...

You can help:

- Stay calm and listen
- Let the person talk about their feelings
- Be accepting; do not judge
- Ask if the person is having suicidal thoughts
- Take all threats of suicide seriously
- Do not swear secrecy – tell someone

Get Help: You can not do it alone

Contact your:

- Family, friends, relatives
- Teachers, clergy, counselors
- Family doctor
- Local or national crisis lines
- Mental health services
- Hospital emergency department



Guidelines for the Helper

1. Get Support, Ask for help

- Enlist the help of other family members, friends and professionals,
- You don't have to do this alone

2. Set Boundaries

- Decide what you can do and what you will do
- Know what's reasonable
- Know when to get help

3. Educate Yourself

- Learn the warning signs
- Learn more about communication skills
- Find out more about suicide

“Social connection is critical. The biggest part of suicide prevention is building a connection with the person and being able to talk with them,” said Barb “If it is a friend or relative who is withdrawing or is going through a rough time, reach out and ask if they are doing okay. Offer care and support.”

Everyone has the potential to help someone in crisis. Helping may cause you to feel anxious and uncomfortable, but try to remain calm and non-judgmental. There are three things that are essential for a helper to know or do:

1. Learn To Recognize the Warning Signs

Eighty to ninety percent of people will communicate either directly or indirectly that they are in distress and may be contemplating suicide. But the communication can be very subtle. It can be a throw-away comment such as “You'd be better off without me” or “I won't be here tomorrow.” These comments present an opportunity to communicate and should not be ignored. Other warning signs to watch out for include:

- Threatens suicide
- Talks about wanting to die
- Shows changes in behavior, appearance, mood
- Abuses drugs and/or alcohol
- Deliberately injures themselves
- Appears depressed, sad, withdraw
- Gives away prized possessions

2. Ask the Questions

Asking if they are suicidal will not put the thought of suicide in their mind, but rather it gives them permission to talk about how they are feeling and open up a line of communication. Listening is the most important thing you can do. If possible, try to express that there are other solutions to the problems they are experiencing and that there are resources to help find those solutions.

How can you help?

Ask:

1. Are you thinking about suicide?
 2. Are you thinking about killing yourself?
- If the reply to these questions is yes, then proceed to the next questions.
3. Do you have a plan?
 4. Do you have access to means to carry out the plan?

3. Get Help

If an individual answers yes to all three questions, it is an urgent situation. Get help immediately. Call 9-1-1. Don't put yourself at risk when intervening, allow professionals to provide assistance.

If they answer that they are contemplating suicide but do not have a plan or the means to carry it out, the situation is not as urgent but you may still want to access additional support.

If the person says that they are not thinking of suicide, but you

intuitively feel that they are at risk and some of the warning signs are present, continue to keep the lines of communication open. If you aren't sure what to do, get help.

Helpers need to decide what they can do and what they will do to support a suicidal person. It is entirely appropriate to ask others for advice and information. Helping a person in crisis can be overwhelming. It is important to take care of yourself.

“When individuals are immersed in their own pain, and it is more intense than they have ever experienced, it can overwhelm them, they see suicide as a way to end the pain. It's hard to know just what makes a difference in turning a life around, because there are so many variables,” said Barb Hinger. “What we do know is that if people connect with someone while they are in emotional pain and help them to find hope, to feel hopeful again, then we can keep those people with us.”



Community Resources in Calgary

There are many organizations in Calgary prepared with information, advice and direction.

Distress Centre and Drug Centre Crisis Line	266-1605
Teen Line	264-8336
Suicide Services, Canadian Mental Health Association	297-1744
Mental Health Line	777-2200
(4:00 – 12:00 p.m., after hour's link to Distress Centre Crisis Line)	
Eastside Family Centres, Crisis	299-9699, or 1-800-563-6106
Westside Family Centres, Crisis	299-9699, or 1-800-563-6106
Telecare Crisis Line	266-0700
Mental Health Information and Options Services	943-1500

To access more information about suicide, contact the Centre for Suicide Prevention at 245-3900, or visit their Web site: www.suicideinfo.ca

The Centre for Suicide Prevention is the world's largest library of English-language information on suicide and suicide behaviors.

**Suicide affects all of us.
Let's talk about it.**