



TRACIE

HEALTHCARE EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS
INFORMATION GATEWAY

Family Reunification and Support
Topic Collection
6/8/15

Topic Collection: Family Reunification and Support

Disasters can strike at any time, forcing many families and friends to be separated from their loved ones or displaced for long periods of time. Tracking and reunification is a key aspect of disaster management and recovery, but also one of the most challenging. The guidance documents, case studies, templates, and systems outlined in this collection will help health and medical providers with better understanding their role in family reunification and support. Healthcare preparedness planners can utilize existing systems and concepts traditionally used by other response agencies and reunification agencies.

Please note: Pediatric and family resources are considered integrated, therefore, there is no separate sub-category in this Topic Collection specific to children/ pediatrics.

Each resource in this Topic Collection is placed into one or more of the following categories (click on the category name to be taken directly to that set of resources). Resources marked with an asterisk (*) appear in more than one category.

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Must Reads

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Citizen Corps. (2011). [Integrating Child Reunification into Emergency Preparedness Plans: Community Preparedness Webinar Series](#).

This webinar transcript (webinar video is no longer available online) describes the presentation made by representatives from FEMA, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the U.S. Department of Justice, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, the District of Columbia and a state and local emergency manager from the state of Connecticut. The presentation focused on different types of reunification systems available and strategies for integrating these procedures and protocols into your jurisdiction's emergency plans.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), American Red Cross (ARC), and National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC). (2013). [Post-Disaster Reunification of Children: A Nationwide Approach](#).

This guidance document provides a comprehensive overview of the coordination processes necessary to reunify children separated from their parents/legal guardians in the event of a large-scale disaster and reflects how the whole community - to include educational, child care, medical, and juvenile justice facilities, nongovernmental organizations, state, local and federal partners, voluntary and faith based organizations, disability and pediatric experts, and private sector partners can work together to achieve one wide ranging mission. This document can assist in developing new, or apply to existing, emergency preparedness plans and/or reunification procedures.

Kimmer, S., Altman, B., Strauss-Riggs, K. (2013). [Tracking and Reunification of Children in Disasters: A Lesson and Reference for Health Professionals](#). Uniformed Services University of the Health Sciences, National Center for Disaster Medicine and Public Health (NCDMPH).

This free, online, self-paced training course uses three case studies (tornado, earthquake, and wildfires) to discuss the key tasks for tracking and reunification of children in disaster, identify designated individuals or agencies to assist in tracking and reunification, and access information on key tasks and contacts. The course length is approximately one-hour and is accredited for Continuing Education credit. There is also guidance available for those that want to use the lesson for in-person training.

Shields, S., Wilson, M., Amara, R., et al. (2013). [Family Information Center Planning Guide for Healthcare Entities](#). Los Angeles County Emergency Medical Services Agency.

This guide for healthcare providers describes the elements to develop a Family Information Center (FIC) plan, which includes providing information, support services, and reunification assistance to families of disaster patients. This guide includes activation, management, and demobilization of a FIC, in addition to example forms, diagrams, and needed resources.

General Resources

Missing Persons Community of Interest. [Missing Persons Community of Interest \(MPCI\) Documents](#). (Accessed 6/1/15).

An online forum for professionals and interested persons dealing with missing persons related issues to dialogue; share education and training opportunities; post resources; foster policy and community standards development to accelerate the incorporation of lessons learned; share emerging technologies; and improve how missing persons information is collected, managed, and acted upon. The Documents page lists various MCPI developed documents as well as resources from member organizations.

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC). [Team Adam](#). (Accessed 6/4/15). A program of specially-trained retired law enforcement professionals from the federal, state and local levels. In addition providing technical assistance to law enforcement agencies and families in serious cases of missing children, they also provide support to

emergency management agencies, hospitals, and public health agencies in the event that children become separated from their families due to disaster.

Guidance Documents

Chung, S., Blake, N. (2014). [Family Reunification After Disasters](#). *Clinical Pediatric Emergency Medicine*. 15(4): 334-342.

This article looks at resources available, at the state and local levels, to reunify families. It also discusses research in family reunification practices and addresses next steps to achieve an integrated functional family reunification plan.

*Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), American Red Cross (ARC), and National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC). (2013). [Post-Disaster Reunification of Children: A Nationwide Approach](#).

This guidance document provides a comprehensive overview of the coordination processes necessary to reunify children separated from their parents/legal guardians in the event of a large-scale disaster and reflects how the whole community - to include educational, child care, medical, and juvenile justice facilities, nongovernmental organizations, state, local and federal partners, voluntary and faith based organizations, disability and pediatric experts, and private sector partners can work together to achieve one wide ranging mission. This document can assist in developing new, or apply to existing, emergency preparedness plans and/or reunification procedures.

Nager, Alan. (2009). [Family Reunification- Concepts and Challenges](#). *Clinical Pediatric Emergency Medicine*, 10(3): 195-207.

Author outlines key family reunification considerations during disaster planning and response. He discusses the challenges and solutions in the following areas: practice and planning, clinical services, ancillary support, transportation and accommodations, communication and identification, and psychological support.

Reidenberg, J., Gellman, R., Debelak, J., et al. (2013). [Privacy and Missing Persons after Natural Disasters](#). Center on Law and Information Policy, Fordham University School of Law and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.

The authors identifies key legal and policy issues surrounding privacy and missing persons following a disaster, and highlights current missing persons information sharing activities during disasters. The authors recommend a set of options and strategies that organizations and policy makers can pursue to address some of the privacy concerns.

*Shields, S., Wilson, M., Amara, R., et al. (2013). [Family Information Center Planning Guide for Healthcare Entities](#). Los Angeles County Emergency Medical Services Agency.

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Lessons Learned/ Case Studies

Barthel, ER., Pierce, JR., Speer, AL., et al. (2013). [Delayed family reunification of pediatric disaster survivors increases mortality and inpatient hospital costs: a simulation study](#). (Abstract Only). *Journal of Surgical Research*, 184(1), 430-437.

The authors used a mathematical simulation to examine how a delay in admitting and discharging pediatric cohort affects mortality and the cost of inpatient care. The authors note that children are often transported to specialty centers after disasters which leads to separation from the families. The results of the simulation argue for improvement in identification technology and logistics for rapid reunification of pediatric survivors with their families.

Blake, N., Stevenson, K. (2009). [Reunification: Keeping Families Together in Crisis](#). (Abstract Only.) *Journal of Trauma-Injury Infection & Critical Care*, 67(2): 147-151.

This article addresses the findings and recommendations of a workgroup drawing attention to the lack of an integrated plan or system for reunifying families after a disaster. Particular attention was paid to children's psychosocial well-being, the lack of interoperable tracking systems and transporting patients and children, especially across state lines.

Broughton, D., Allen, E., Hannemann, R., Petrikin, J. (2006). [Getting 5000 Families Back Together: Reuniting Fractured Families After a Disaster: The Role of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children](#). *Pediatrics*, 117(4): 442-445.

This article highlights the efforts made by NCMEC post-Katrina to reunify children and their families. Both Project ALERT and Team Adam were utilized along with the help of private organizations.

Katrina Citizens Leadership Corps. (2009). [What It Takes To Rebuild A Village After A Disaster: Stories from Internally Displaced Children and Families of Hurricane Katrina and Their Lessons for Our Nation](#). Children's Defense Fund Library.

This article includes excerpts to the President from internally displaced children regarding what they expect to be done within the government that will allow them to be

reunified with their families. It also lists ways to prepare for future disasters that will prevent families being split up due to a disaster.

Louisiana Department of Health and Hospitals. (2006). [Reuniting the Families of Rita and Katrina: Louisiana Family Assistance Center](#).

This report documents key missions of the Louisiana Family Assistance Center after Hurricanes Rita and Katrina. They provide background on their tasks, challenges, statistics of families supported, and lessons learned. The center was open for 11 months and had 13,197 missing reports filed, 99% of the missing list cleared, and 98% of the human remains have been identified.

Millman, J., Peterson, J., Ringness, K., Yantzi, J. (2014). [Post-Disaster Missing Persons Process: San Francisco 311 Customer Service Center](#). Goldman School of Public Policy.

San Francisco 311 asked the authors of this report to investigate alternative systems that (a) collect and organize missing persons information collected through a call center, (b) identify “found” people, and (c) share the information with requisite city agencies. The authors established eight principal criteria related to evaluate alternatives’ ability to reliably and securely collect, organize, and share missing persons data and to co-ordinate amongst government and nongovernment actors and provided an analysis of several reunification systems and recommendations for the city to consider.

Plans, Tools, and Templates

Chung, S., Christoudias, C.M., Darrell, T., et al. (2012). [A Novel Image-based Tool to Reunite Children With Their Families After Disasters](#). Academic Emergency Medicine, 19(11): 1227-1234.

This article reports the findings of tests completed to determine the accuracy of various child identification tools. One tool, “Feature-Attribute-Matching,” extracts facial features from photographs to be matched with a parent’s description of their child. The other tool, “User-Feedback,” allows parents to choose photographs resembling their child which then reprioritizes the images in the database.

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one wide ranging mission. This document can assist in developing new, or apply to existing, emergency preparedness plans and/or reunification procedures.

Hadi, Tamer. NYC Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Office of Emergency Preparedness and Response. (2015). [Using Health Information Exchange for Family Reunification](#). 2015 Annual Public Health Preparedness Summit.

This presentation given at the 2015 Annual Public Health Preparedness Summit, gives an overview of existing family reunification systems, why the New York City Emergency Patient Search (NYCEPS) workgroup recommended to leverage Health Information Exchanges (HIE), and how NYCEPS was developed. Also includes legal and privacy considerations for hospitals and healthcare facilities.

*Pate, B. (2008). [Identifying and Tracking Disaster Victims: State-of-the-Art Technology Review](#). (Abstract Only.) Journal of Family & Community Health, 31(1): 23-34.

An analysis of various tracking systems to use in times of disaster and their limitations in terms of scalability.

*Shields, S., Wilson, M., Amara, R., et al. (2013). [Family Information Center Planning Guide for Healthcare Entities](#). Los Angeles County Emergency Medical Services Agency.

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Reunification Systems

American Red Cross. [Safe and Well](#). (Accessed 6/1/15).

This web-based system maintained by the American Red Cross allows users to list themselves as safe and well, and to search for family and friends that have registered as safe and well.

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). [National Emergency Registry and Locator System \(NEFRLS\)](#). (Accessed 6/1/15).

This secure, online systems provides a platform for survivors and loved ones to communicate their location and leave messages. It provides the following options for users: I am Displaced, Search for a Displaced Person, Report/ Search for a Missing Child, and I want to Register/ Search by Telephone.

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC). [Unaccompanied Minors Registry](#). (Accessed 6/1/15).

This data collection tool is focused on collecting basic information of children who have been separated from their families as a result of a disaster. Individuals can provide basic information and photos concerning a located child whose parents are missing. Once registration information is submitted, NCMEC will cross-reference it against any potential phone calls from a child's parents who may be searching for their child.

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC). [National Emergency Child Locator Center \(NECLC\)](#). (Accessed 6/1/15).

This dedicated call center operated by the NCMEC can be activated at the request of a disaster-impacted state to intake child-related reunification calls, to alleviate some of the call load from the impacted state's emergency communications systems, and to coordinate tips and leads with on-the-ground reunification efforts. The NECLC has the capacity to expand or relocate to back-up sites.

*Pate, B. (2008). [Identifying and Tracking Disaster Victims: State-of-the-Art Technology Review](#). (Abstract Only.) Journal of Family & Community Health, 31(1): 23-34.

An analysis of various tracking systems to use in times of disaster and their limitations in terms of scalability.

Thoma, G., Antani, S., Gill, M., et al. (2012). [NLM People Locator: A system for family reunification](#). (Abstract Only.) IT Professional, 14 (3): 13-21

An overview of a reunification system called People Locator created by the National Library of Medicine. This database has various connection options such as submitting person information via email, using a web page, or using the mobile application ReUnite. At this time the database uses photos and metadata (age, gender and name) to support reunification.

Trainings/ Webinars

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Agencies and Organizations

Note: The agencies and organizations listed in this section have a page, program, or specific research dedicated to this topic area.

National Center for Missing & Exploited Children. [Disaster Response](#).

National Mass Care Strategy. [Reunification](#).

Youth.gov. [Recovery and Reunification](#).

*This ASPR TRACIE Topic Collection was comprehensively reviewed in June 2015 by the following subject matter experts(alphabetical order): **Katherine Galifianakis**, Mass Care Division, American Red Cross; **Sharon Hawa**, National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC); **John Hick**, MD, HHS ASPR and Hennepin County Medical Center; **Lauralee Koziol**, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA); and **Catherine Welker**, MEP, Mass Care/Emergency Assistance Section Individual Assistance Division, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).*