



Summary: Research-into- Action Brief

Jacqueline Hayden¹ and
Marla Peta²

¹Macquarie University,
Sydney, Australia
²Save the Children

Research-into-Action Brief series

The series provides concise summaries of academic and grey literature on a range of topics for practitioners working in the fields of child-centred risk reduction (CCRR), climate change adaptation (CCA), and school safety. This summary highlights the main messages in the full Research-into-Action Brief on early childhood and disaster risk reduction.

Find the full Research-into-Action Brief series at:

www.gadrrres.net/resources

Early Childhood and Disaster Risk Reduction

Young children who experience disasters are at high risk of injury, malnutrition, disease and disability. Children under eight years of age are especially vulnerable because distress and trauma can affect their growth and development, and long-term health and wellbeing (UNICEF, 2011, 2017). Infants who have been weaned and children with low socioeconomic status have been identified as the most at-risk groups for neglect, abuse and death during and after disasters (Datar et al., 2013). Therefore, a focus on early childhood disaster risk reduction (ECDRR) at national/regional, community, classroom and household levels is essential.

Early childhood is associated with three stages of development. It is important to note that the stages will overlap, depending on the context, maturity and language levels of each child. The three stages, and how they relate to ECDRR, are:

- **Birth to toddlerhood (approximately to two years old):** ECDRR involves sharing information with caregivers and ensuring that the environments where the children spend their time are safe.
- **Preschool-age children (approximately three to five years old):** ECDRR involves ensuring facilities are safe and using classroom activities which promote DRR problem solving. Preschool children can help share DRR information with their families and communities.
- **Children in the early years of school (approximately six to eight years old):** ECDRR participation and programs can be integrated within the Comprehensive School Safety framework (GADRRRES, 2014). This includes safe school facilities, school disaster management and risk reduction and resilience education.

ECDRR involves actions at the following levels: national and regional, community, classroom, and household:

- **National and regional level:** Most countries have developed national plans or systems for early childhood care and education. These plans often provide a good foundation for ECDRR. National policies and procedures that foster and support access to quality early childhood programs are particularly important for ECDRR.
- **Community level:** Activities at this level include (1) identifying and assessing local risks and hazards and the child-friendliness of communities; (2) reducing dangers in the built environment, for example, in early childhood facilities and community shelters; (3) including a specific early childhood focus in community disaster response planning.
- **Classroom level:** Early childhood teachers and practitioners can develop, co-ordinate, supervise and apply ECDRR program activities to facilitate the participation of young children in DRR. Teachers can use resources and aids to enhance children's awareness of hazards, skill development and involvement in DRR activities. Programs and resources for school children can be adapted for young(er) children. Media and community activities can be used to reach children who do not attend formal early childhood programs.

C&A Foundation



- **Household level:** Young children and their families can share information discussed in preschools, develop household evacuation plans, identify a family emergency meeting place and develop and safely store a family emergency kit.

Practical Applications

Practitioners involved in ECDRR program design and implementation should strive to:

1. Include the needs of young children in policy, planning, risk reduction and preparedness, at all levels

At the national or regional level, promote awareness of potential hazards and the needs of young children. At the community level, investigate current strengths and gaps in services and advocate for enhanced supports for young children and families, including a specific focus in local emergency planning. Engage city/town planners, education departments and community members in careful consideration of location, access and design of early childhood facilities. Ensure young children and families have access to appropriately equipped safe shelters. Use media and other communication methods to extend messages about ECDRR to those who may not have access to early childhood programs.

At the classroom level, acknowledge and support the ability of young children to learn and share information, and to participate in risk-reduction activities. Lead ECDRR programs to build knowledge and skills among children and caregivers. Include a DRR focus in educational materials, games, songs and other teaching methods. Ensure furniture and equipment are arranged for quick evacuation and that infant evacuation processes are in place. Raise awareness administrators, health professionals and other adults who play a role in children's lives to ensure that they know what to do before, during and after a disaster.

2. Ensure the participation of young children

Children from very young ages have the capacity to participate in risk reduction (Peek, 2008). Vulnerability is reduced and resilience is enhanced when young children and their caregivers have access to resources and information, and are encouraged to participate in risk reduction, preparedness and response activities.

3. Customise ECDRR to the local context

Work with local ECCE co-ordination networks, stakeholders and advisors to guide ECDRR, and to customise approaches to ensure that strategies are culturally appropriate and address the needs of each community. A committee or group of advisors with local knowledge has been identified as an effective strategy for addressing this task (Hayden and Cologon, 2011). Professionals and advisors with early childhood knowledge can help adapt existing resources and materials for local families and children (Hayden and Cologon, 2011).

More information

All the references in this Research-into-Action Brief, and many more, can be found in the Child-Centred Risk Reduction and Comprehensive School Safety Bibliography at:

https://www.zotero.org/groups/1857446/ccrr_css

Find all the references on this topic by using the tag "Early Childhood."

Readings

American Academy of Pediatrics, American Public Health Association, National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care and Early Education 2011, *Caring for Our Children - National Health and Safety Performance Standards: Guidelines for Early Care and Education Programs*, 3rd edn.

FEMA 2013. IS-36: Multihazard Planning for Childcare <http://training.fema.gov/EMIWeb/IS/courseOverview.aspx?code=is-36>.

GADRRRES 2015, *Comprehensive School Safety Framework*

IFRC & Save the Children 2018, *Public Awareness and Public Education: Key Messages*, 2nd edn.

Riopelle, D. et al. 2004, *Head Start Disaster Preparedness Workbook*, UCLA Center for Public Health and Disasters, Los Angeles.