FORTRESSREADY

# RAISING READY KIDS

## A Parent's Guide to Building Children's Emergency Skills and Confidence

BOOK TWO IN THE FORTRESSREADY FAMILY READINESS SERIES



*Learn through adventure. Prepare through play.*

# A Beginning You Can Build Together

A child does not need to understand every danger in the world to begin learning how to meet a difficult moment. They can learn where their light belongs, how to ask a question, who will help them, and what their family does next.

Those lessons can begin on an ordinary afternoon. A picnic becomes a chance to pack water and choose a familiar snack. A short walk becomes a lesson in noticing landmarks. A backyard campout becomes practice finding a dry change of clothes. Small experiences give a family something real to build on.

We created Raising Ready Kids for the adults making time for those experiences. You may be a parent, grandparent, foster parent, or another trusted caregiver. You may have a full camping kit, or a small budget and a kitchen table. Begin with what is available and the child in front of you.

The first two chapters begin with connection: explaining a change, listening to the child's questions, and helping them experience a manageable success. Later chapters will turn that foundation into packing, outdoor adventures, safety habits, and family practice. The goal is a child who can say, 'I know a next step, and I know who can help me.'

Give children useful roles while keeping responsibility for their protection with adults. Let them speak up, change their minds about an activity, and ask for another explanation. A child can feel nervous and still learn. They can also need a quieter day, a different way to participate, or professional support.

Use these pages at your family's pace. Try one activity, listen afterward, and repeat what proves helpful. Share the little successes. Put a child's drawing beside the family plan. Keep room in the ready bag for something that feels like home.

We hope the time you spend preparing also becomes time your children remember with warmth: someone listened, someone helped, and together you learned something useful. Thank you for giving them that beginning.

With gratitude and our best wishes,

## Marty & Sparky

# Ready Children. Connected Families.

**FortressReady helps caring adults prepare children for disruption through honest conversation, achievable skills, enjoyable family practice, and practical plans. Our mission is to build confidence and connection while keeping responsibility for children's safety with the adults who care for them.**

### Connection before complexity

Help each child feel heard and understand who is helping them.

### Small steps with a purpose

Choose a useful task, provide suitable support, and notice what the child actually learns.

### A place for every child

Adapt language, pace, movement, and materials to ability, communication, and comfort.

### Affordable family practice

Use ordinary possessions and familiar places before buying more equipment.

### Learning that continues

Review and adapt as children grow. Asking for help remains a useful skill at every age.

#### IN THIS BOOK

Seventeen chapters combine parent guidance, affordable family activities, planning pages, a fillable chapter worksheet, and a relevant coloring page. Reusable tools, a Youth Readiness Passport, a printable certificate, source notes, an alphabetical index, and our afterword help you keep learning together.

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# Use the Book at Your Family's Pace

## Choose the child's way to participate

Age bands are starting points, not ability tests. Around ages 3-5, use pictures and one step. Around ages 6-9, try a short sequence and a small choice. Around ages 10-13, invite explanations and simple planning. Teens can help demonstrate by agreement. At any age, adapt movement, language, sensory conditions, and communication.

## Prepare one short, ordinary session

Read the activity yourself. Use existing suitable materials and normal services as a fallback. Name the supervising adult, explain that this is practice, and agree on an accessible stop signal. Stop for distress, fatigue, missing care, or unsuitable conditions. Children can pause or decline an activity.

## Use each chapter as a small cycle

Read or explain one idea. Try a manageable activity. Ask what helped. Record the result on the worksheet. End with the coloring page if the child enjoys it. Coloring is optional; an adult can describe the scene or the child can draw their own version.

## Keep adult responsibilities clear

These pages support parent-led learning. They do not replace local emergency instructions, equipment manuals, individualized care, or professional mental-health support. During a real emergency, meet immediate needs and follow current directions before returning to the workbook.

## Print what you need

This book is 7 x 10.5 inches. Print the whole book using your printer's fit-to-page option, or select only the pages you need. A separate seventeen-page coloring packet is sized for US Letter paper with generous margins. Worksheets can be completed digitally or by hand; keep a blank master copy.

# Begin With the Child in Front of You

For the parent / Explain the next change clearly and make room for the child to respond.

## Ask before you explain

Choose a reasonably settled moment with an adult available to listen. Ask what the child has noticed or heard. They may be worried about a pet, a missed birthday, or a different sleeping place rather than the concern uppermost in your mind.

Start with the question they bring. The American Academy of Pediatrics advises giving understandable information and avoiding unnecessary alarming detail or false reassurance. [P01]

## Make the next step concrete

Name the change that affects the child: we are eating a picnic meal, staying with an agreed relative, or using our lights while an outage is addressed. State only what is known, then say what the responsible adult is doing next.

Example: 'The power is out in our area. I am checking the official update. We will stay together here while I decide our next step.' Change those words to fit the actual situation; never claim a location is safe without checking.

## Let participation be small

A child might choose an appropriate snack or point to the picture of the next activity. They do not need to monitor the news, decide when to evacuate, or reassure a frightened adult.

Notice whether the child needs a quieter setting, movement, a communication aid, or time before talking. Begin with one useful sentence and one opportunity to ask a question. More information can come later.

> **MAKE IT OURS**
>
> Ask what the child is wondering. Write one truthful sentence about the change and one adult action that supports the next step.

Source notes: P01 / pages 167-186.

# Words for Different Ages

Original example scripts / Adapt the detail to understanding and communication, not age alone.

### Young children: one change at a time

For a child around ages 3-5, use a short explanation tied to their immediate experience: 'We are sleeping at Grandma's tonight. I am coming with you. You can bring your bear.' Use the actual caregiver and destination. Show a picture if it helps.

Offer a small choice you can honor, such as which of two suitable pajamas to pack. Repeat the next step as often as needed without making the repetition a test.

### School-age children: a reason and a job

For children around ages 6-9: 'We are leaving because the local officials told people in our area to go. I have our route and destination. Your job is to put on your shoes and stay with me.'

Check understanding kindly: 'Tell me or show me what we are doing next.' Correct confusion and keep the adult job separate from the child's task. Follow school and caregiver procedures when children are elsewhere.

### Older children: facts and limits

For ages 10-13 and teenagers, explain what is confirmed, what is uncertain, and when you expect to check for another update. Invite questions and preferences when time allows.

Example: 'I don't know when we can return. We have permission to stay here tonight, and I will check again after breakfast.' Keep longer financial or safety decisions with adults. A child who uses fewer words may need simpler language at any age.

> **MAKE IT OURS**
>
> Choose a script that fits your child. Replace every example with real people, real arrangements, and an actual next information check.

# Leave Space for Honest Feelings

For the parent / A useful conversation can include sadness, worry, frustration, or silence.

### Answer the concern you hear

If a child says, 'Will our house be there?' avoid promising an outcome you cannot know. Try: 'I don't know yet. We will check when the people responsible say it is safe. Right now, you are with me and we have a place to stay tonight.' Only use the parts that are true.

For a question you cannot answer, say that plainly and explain what you can do next. The child can hear uncertainty alongside a clear caring action.

### Keep familiar anchors where possible

Identify a few ordinary activities you can maintain: a familiar bedtime story, regular opportunities to eat, a preferred comfort item, or a check-in with an agreed caregiver. Explain changes instead of expecting a child to infer the new routine. [P02]

Let a child miss a toy, friend, or usual activity. Listening does not require fixing every disappointment immediately. Avoid ranking one child's worry against another person's loss.

### Choose information deliberately

Keep adult discussions of unconfirmed reports and graphic coverage away from children's routine space. If a child encounters upsetting news, ask what they understood and correct specific misinformation. CDC advises limiting repeated disaster-media exposure. [P02]

Invite a question later without requiring the child to talk now. Tell them who is available if they want help. Questions can arrive during play or at bedtime rather than during the planned family meeting.

> **MAKE IT OURS**
>
> Name two familiar routine anchors, one way the child can ask a later question, and the adult who will check in again.

Source notes: P02 / pages 167-186.

# Activity: Our Today Plan

Time: about 10 minutes / Cost: use paper and drawing materials already owned.

### Prepare three ordinary steps

Choose a calm practice day with normal care available. Draw three large boxes on paper. Fill them with simple pictures for now, next, and later: for example, eat a snack, pack a light, then walk to a familiar permitted picnic spot with an adult.

Explain that the pictures describe today's practice. Do not tell the child a disaster is happening. Let them point, draw, dictate, or use their usual communication method.

### Walk through the plan together

Ask the child to choose one manageable contribution, such as placing their hat beside the bag. Name who stays with them and where the activity takes place. An adult handles equipment, route checks, care, and any decision to change plans.

Before moving to the next picture, say what is happening. If plans change, replace that picture and explain the new arrangement. A changed plan is something to communicate, not a mistake to hide.

### Adapt and finish

Younger children can use two pictures and point. School-age children can add a simple label. Older children can help explain what information would make a plan clearer, while adults retain the decisions.

Stop for distress, fatigue, missing supervision, or unsuitable conditions. Afterward ask, 'Which picture helped? What should we show differently?' Keep the finished plan where the responsible adults and child can use it.

> **MAKE IT OURS**
>
> Success check: the child can show the next step and identify the adult helping them. Record one change that made the plan clearer.

# Activity: Questions and Wonder Cards

Time: 10 minutes or less / Cost: scrap paper, pencil, and an envelope or small box.

### Make room for a question

Fold scrap paper into cards. Invite the child to draw or dictate a question about an ordinary change, an outing, or the family plan. They may choose to leave a card blank. Explain who will read the cards and that the child can also ask directly.

Use this as a private family conversation aid, not a public display of a child's worries. Keep personal details off anything that travels outside the household.

### Sort by what the adults can do

Read one card together if the child agrees. Place it in one of three groups: we can answer now; an adult will check; or we can talk about the feeling even when the answer is uncertain.

For a question in the second group, name the adult and a realistic time to check back. For the third, ask what would help right now: a quiet activity, a familiar object, or sitting with someone. Do not ask the child to solve the uncertainty.

### Use the child's response

A younger child can choose between pictures or show an object. An older child may prefer writing or a conversation without cards. Offer the same choice to a child who finds drawing difficult.

Stop if the activity becomes uncomfortable. Return to an ordinary routine and offer another chance later. Success is that the child has an accessible way to ask; it is not the number of worries they reveal. Keep any agreed follow-up with the parent worksheet.

> **MAKE IT OURS**
>
> Choose where questions can go, who responds, and how that adult will follow up. Respect the child's choice about sharing.

# When the Change Is Already Happening

For the parent / Meet immediate needs, keep explanations usable, and seek support when needed.

## Shrink the conversation to what helps

During a real departure, state the immediate instruction, stay with the child, and follow current local directions. Save the worksheet for later. A comfort item is useful when reachable; do not delay a necessary evacuation to search for it.

At a receiving location, identify who is supervising, where the child can rest, and how essential care continues. Ask the receiving adult about the actual arrangements rather than promising the same routines as home.

## Keep another caregiver informed

Share the brief explanation and relevant care or communication needs with the agreed caregiver. Give the child consistent information and follow authorized pickup and reunification procedures. CDC encourages checking school or childcare emergency plans before an event. [P05]

Ask which familiar activities remain possible today. The child may need more adult help with something they could do independently before the disruption.

## Make support part of the plan

Look for changes in sleep, play, eating, interaction, and everyday functioning. A quiet child may need support too. Contact a pediatrician, school counselor, or qualified mental-health professional when reactions concern you, persist, worsen, or interfere with daily life. Do not wait for a completed activity log to ask for help. [P06]

The activities in this book support family preparation; they do not assess or treat trauma. Complete the chapter worksheet when useful, then invite the child to color the family conversation scene on the next page.

> **MAKE IT OURS**
>
> Write the helping adults, current routine anchors, caregiver information to share, and any question that needs professional support.

Source notes: P05, P06 / pages 167-186.

# Talking Through Change Together

Type into the fields or print and write. Let a child draw, point, or dictate. Keep completed personal information private.

Child / preferred communication / adult / date

What has the child noticed, heard, or asked?

What is confirmed? Our brief truthful explanation

What is uncertain? Adult checking / next update

Now / next / later: pictures, words, or plan location

Responsible caregiver / backup / information to share

One child-sized task / adult responsibilities

Routine anchors / comfort items / accessible choices

Pause signals / support or professional questions

What helped? Next conversation / owner / review

Other questions / child's own words / accessible changes to try

# We Can Talk Together



Color the family making a simple plan. Who can listen when you have a question? You can tell, point, draw, or ask an adult to help.