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THE SCHOOL LIBRARIAN'S GUIDE TO DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

Planning Ahead to Protect Students, Staff, Collections, and Learning

The school library is an active learning space that supports students and staff throughout the school day. Emergencies can affect the library just as they affect classrooms, offices, and other school spaces. A few practical preparations can help school librarians respond confidently, protect library resources, and support a safe return to learning.

Know Your School's Emergency Procedures

School librarians play an important role in carrying out the school's emergency plan. Make sure you understand your responsibilities and how procedures apply to the library.

- Review the school's emergency operations plan and staff responsibilities.
- Know the procedures for fire, severe weather, lockdowns, evacuations, and reunification.
- Identify the nearest exits, designated shelter areas, and alternate routes from the library.
- Keep emergency contacts and communication procedures easy to access.
- Ask your administrator how to handle emergencies when classes are changing, students are browsing independently, or multiple groups are using the library.

If an emergency occurred during library time, would you know where to direct students, how to account for them, and whom to contact?

Prepare the Library Space

The library's layout, furniture, shelving, and equipment can affect how safely people move through the space during an emergency.

- Keep exits, walkways, and access to emergency equipment clear.
- Secure tall shelving and heavy equipment according to school safety procedures.
- Store supplies and materials in ways that reduce the risk of falling objects.
- Identify safe locations within the library based on your school's emergency guidance.

- Keep a flashlight and other approved emergency supplies accessible.
- Report building concerns, such as leaks, damaged electrical outlets, or unstable shelving, to the appropriate school staff.

Walk through the library as if you were preparing students to leave quickly or move to a designated shelter area. Identify any areas that need attention.

Protect Collections, Technology, and Records

Library materials and technology support instruction, reading, research, and daily school operations. Practical safeguards can help protect these resources and speed recovery after an emergency.

- Keep digital records backed up through school-approved systems.
- Know whom to contact about protecting or restoring library computers, circulation systems, and other technology.
- Maintain current inventories or records of valuable equipment and specialized materials.
- Store essential documents and contact information in an approved, accessible location.
- Identify collection areas that may be especially vulnerable to water, heat, or other damage.
- Learn the school's procedures for reporting damage and coordinating cleanup or recovery.

Which library resources would be most important to restore first, and what information would help that process?

Help Students Know What to Do

Students may experience emergencies differently depending on their age, needs, and familiarity with the library. Clear directions and consistent routines can help students respond.

- Teach library-specific expectations that support the school's emergency procedures.
- Explain how students should respond to announcements and directions while in the library.
- Review procedures with students who regularly use the library independently or in small groups.
- Coordinate with classroom teachers and support staff to account for students who may need additional assistance.

- Use calm, clear language when giving directions during an emergency.
- Follow school procedures for attendance, student accountability, and communication.

Consider how you would account for students from different classes, visiting groups, and students who arrive or leave during a transition.

Plan for Interrupted Library Services

Emergencies may temporarily close the library, interrupt technology, or change how students access materials and learning support. A simple continuity plan helps you identify priorities and restore services.

- Identify the library services students and teachers rely on most.
- Keep essential contact information for administrators, technology staff, and facilities personnel current.
- Consider how students and teachers could access reading materials or digital resources during a closure.
- Identify essential tasks that could continue remotely, if permitted by school procedures.
- Establish how the library will communicate changes in hours, access, or services through approved school channels.
- Coordinate with school leadership before reopening the library or returning materials and equipment to use.

Start with 1 question: Which library service would your school community need restored first?

Make Preparedness Part of Your Routine

Disaster preparedness is most effective when it becomes part of regular library operations. Review emergency procedures at the start of each school year, check supplies, update contact information, and discuss library-specific responsibilities with your administrator. Revisit the plan whenever the library layout, staffing, or school procedures change.

During an emergency, follow your school's established procedures and the directions of authorized school personnel and emergency responders. Your preparation helps you respond, support students, and contribute to the school's recovery.

Prepared librarians help create safer, more resilient school libraries!