

how to prepare for the unexpected an emergency kit for college students

by Christopher Michael Jones

*Author of *What to Expect When You're Accepted: An African American Christian's Guide to College* (Judson Press, 2007)*

Unfortunately, history has shown us that a disaster can occur on your college campus when you least expect it. No matter where you may happen to be at a given time, floods, fire, fallen ceilings, gang violence, an infectious outbreak, bomb scares, and in the worst case scenario, mass murders can take place right in the middle of your classroom. Bad things can happen. The good news is that many colleges and universities are taking a more proactive approach in designing emergency plans to help students and faculty escape the crisis situations that could come their way.

Don't rely only on your school's administration when it comes to protecting your health and life during your college years. Campus security can't be everywhere; the health clinic may be a long difficult trek away; and you may be among the first to know when something goes down. In conjunction with common sense and uncommon grace, you may save yourself and some of your peers by taking some basic steps to prepare for the unexpected.

There are three critical kinds of ingredients when it comes to developing an emergency kit for a potential tragedy, crisis, or disaster. Those ingredients fall into the categories of physical supplies, emergency response information, and spiritual resources. Having these ingredients at your fingertips can save valuable time—and priceless lives, including your own. Let's look at the essentials in physical supplies and preparation first.

Be Prepared—With Physical Supplies

ESSENTIALS

Water. If you can, store a three-day supply of bottled water in your room or storage area. At the recommended 8 cups of water daily, that translates into 1.5 gallons. In addition, purchase a box of 50 water purification tablets and store them in a safe dry place. You may need them in the event your water supply becomes contaminated. A standard source for these tablets is a company called Aquatabs (www.aquatabs.ca).

First-aid kit. Be sure that it includes pain reliever, burn ointment, sterile gauze pads, antibiotic ointment among other essential supplies.

Prescription medications. Keep all your prescription medications in a safe place. Write down any allergy related issues you may have and place that information in your wallet or purse where emergency personnel or Good Samaritans might find it.

Corrective lenses. If you wear contacts or eyeglasses make sure you have a spare pair someplace close to you, as well as supplies for your contacts.

Transportation. If you have a car, keep an extra set of car keys somewhere safe. Tell your family members and a trusted friend where the keys are. You may need their assistance one day—even if the emergency is as commonplace as you locking your keys in the car!

Fire extinguisher. Dormitories and apartment buildings typically have one in the hallway for public use, but purchase one for your own room or rental unit. Having it handy may save precious seconds in case of a fire.

Survival supplies. A utility knife, flashlight, box of matches, and a pair of strong scissors will never fail you in a crisis moment. Put these items away and keep them safe. Check the flashlight batteries to ensure they haven't expired, and ensure the matches are waterproof. (StanSport Waterproof Matches are a good choice; you can order them online at www.quakekare.com). Be sure you have candles to go with the matches!

Food. Purchase canned goods and a variety of nonperishable dry foods. Be sure that such items have a long shelf life and that they are edible without preliminary preparation. And don't forget that manual can opener.

SAFETY

Protective footwear. Strong and sturdy shoes are a must. You may think I'm a bit over the top, but I always keep a pair of steel-toed shoes and knee-high gumboots in my closet.

Gloves. Heavy-duty gloves are invaluable should you need to clear broken glass and other types of debris.

Extra clothes. Store a spare set of heavy-duty clothing somewhere safe. Place the items in a vacuum-tight bag if you can. In the event of a flood, such a bag could come in handy.

Cell phone. Never lose sight of your mobile phone. Keep it close by (and fully charged, and grabbing your phone's charger wouldn't be a bad idea, either) at all times. And remember to enter your emergency contact name and number in the phone's memory under "ICE" (In Case of Emergency) in the address book.

Map. A current roadmap of the area will help you avoid disorientation when detours block your normal route of travel.

Storage containers. Purchase at least one water-safe container of some sort in which to store essential documents, cherished belongings, and valuable electronics.

Writing implements. Pens, pencils, and permanent markers are good items to have on hand in an emergency. Place them along with writing paper in a Ziploc bag.

Miscellaneous. What is your favorite book? How about that favorite puzzle book? Buy an extra copy and store it with your emergency supplies. Like to play cards? Keep a spare deck with your survival kit. A portable radio will be useful for information as well as entertainment. You will be thankful to have something to while away your time should you ever be stranded in a crisis situation.

SANITATION SUPPLIES

- Antibacterial hand sanitizer
- Soap, both bar and liquid
- Toothpaste and toothbrush
- Shampoo
- Medicated powder
- Feminine hygiene products
- Bath towels
- Paper towels
- Box of tissues
- Toilet tissue
- Trash bags

TOOLS AND SUPPLIES

- Screwdriver (flathead and Phillips)
- Adjustable wrench
- Hammer
- Rope
- Duct tape
- Chalk

REMINDERS

■ Take a course in first aid and CPR. You never know when the information will come in handy!

■ Learn how to turn off electricity, water, gas, and heating and cooling systems in the building where you live. If you live in a dormitory, ask your resident assistant (RA) or dorm director about emergency measures related to those systems.

■ Make a habit of looking out for hazardous materials that might affect your area of residence, especially if you live off campus. Different types of acids and alkaline substances can sometimes be found in old batteries or poorly marked commercial products. Make sure you

know how to handle such substances.

- Plan an emergency-response session with your family, roommates, and RA to discuss exit routes, emergency numbers, and meeting places in case of an evacuation.

- Make sure that a trusted friend or roommate and your RA have your contact information, as well as the emergency contact information for your closest family members. Also give your family the names and contact information of your roommates or other close campus friends. Equipped with such information, they can ensure that you are found in the event of an emergency—on campus or at home.

- Develop and discuss with your family alternative ways of contacting you in the event of an emergency. How might your family members locate and communicate with you? Where can loved ones expect to find you—and with whom?

- Establish several different meeting places that are most familiar to you. Make one meeting place directly outside your apartment, dorm, or rental unit. Identify an alternative rendezvous point away from your campus in the event you cannot return to your dorm or apartment. Then be sure your important contact persons (family as well as friends on campus) have that information at their disposal.

- Determine how you will exit your apartment, dormitory, or off-campus rental unit in case of an evacuation. Where are the exits in your building? Locate at least two ways to exit the premises where you reside, and then execute an emergency drill. You want to be confident that you can actually navigate the emergency exit you have planned.

- Identify a long-distance emergency contact person. Does that advice sound strange? The Department of Homeland Security and the Red Cross tell us that it is often easier to call long distance than locally during an emergency situation. What out-of-state friend or family member can you call in the event of an emergency? Again, be sure to share this person's information with your immediate family and campus friends or roommate.

- Make sure you are familiar with your college or university's methods of communication. Watch the daily postings on the bulletin board in your dormitory or the student center. Keep an eye on the video monitor in the student lounge. Know where to look online or what numbers to call to get emergency notifications. These locations serve as pivotal points of reference by which information is shared on a daily basis. Monitor these locations carefully, and should an emergency notification be broadcast, take it seriously!

- Become familiar with your state's information and referral hotline. Depending where you are located, 211 or another substitute number can be dialed from any landline telephone and most cell phones. Such numbers offer emergency information regarding the nearest evacuation routes and access to water, food, and shelter.

- Visit the following websites for more information about developing an emergency plan and building a disaster supply kit: www.ready.gov and www.redcross.org. To order a ready-made, emergency-preparedness kit, go to www.redcrossstore.org.

Be Prepared—With Information Resources

ALCOHOL AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

- The BACCHUS Network (www.bacchusgamma.org)
- College Drinking Prevention (www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov)
- Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (www.samhsa.org)
- Tobacco Free U (www.tobaccofreeu.org)

Additional Online Resources

■ Alcohol Poisoning — This is a fact sheet from the College Drinking Prevention site (www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov/OtherAlcoholInformation/factsAboutAlcoholPoisoning.aspx).

■ Alcohol Screening — This site helps college students assess drinking patterns and learn about alcohol consumption and health (www.alcoholscreening.org).

■ Wasting the Best & the Brightest: Substance Abuse at America's Colleges & Universities—The 2007 report from the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse at Columbia University may be downloaded for free or ordered for \$25.00 at this website (www.casacolumbia.org/supportcasa/item.asp?cID=12&PID=155).

DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

- National Center for Victims of Crime (www.ncvc.org)
- National Center on Domestic and Sexual Violence (www.ncdsv.org)
- National Sexual Violence Resource Center (www.nsvrc.org)
- Network of Victim Assistance (www.novabucks.org)
- New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault (www.nycagainstrape.org)
- Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (www.rainn.org)
- Security On Campus, Inc. (www.securityoncampus.org)
- Women's Justice Center (www.justicewomen.com)

Additional Online Resources

■ Drug-Facilitated Rape: Looking for the Missing Pieces (NCJRS) — This free download is a reprint from the National Institute of Justice's *NIJ Journal* (April 2000) and describes the phenomenon of drug-facilitated rape, including brief summaries on the most common date-rape drugs, GHB and Rohypnol (www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/jr000243c.pdf).

■ Stalking Resource Center — This data, provided by the National Center for Victims of Crime, offers information, legislation, statistics, and resources in both English and Spanish (www.ncvc.org/src/main.aspx?dbID=dash_Home).

MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES

- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention (www.afsp.org)
- Campus Blues (www.campusblues.com)
- National Eating Disorders Association (www.nationaleatingdisorders.org)
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (www.suicidepreventionlifeline.org)

Additional Online Resources

- Depression Screening — This site offers college students information about depression and its treatment. In addition, college students can take an online screening test (www.depression-screening.org).
- *The Truth about Suicide: Real Stories of Depression in College* — This film was produced by the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. Descriptions, factsheets, and video excerpts are available on the foundation’s website (www.afsp.org).
- “What Do These Students Have in Common?” Booklet — This online booklet from the National Institute of Mental Health helps college students to recognize and deal with depression (www.nimh.nih.gov/publicat/students.cfm).

GENERAL INFORMATION RESOURCE SITES

- Go Ask Alice! (www.goaskalice.columbia.edu)
- Phoenix House (www.factsontap.org)

Additional Online Resources

- Internet Addiction Self Tests — Free online tests for individuals to test their own addictions (www.netaddiction.com/resources), including an assessment called “Surfing, Not Studying,” which deals with student Internet addictions.

Be Prepared—With the Word of God

TO COMBAT FEAR

- It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed. (Deuteronomy 31:8)
- Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff—they comfort me. (Psalm 23:4)
- The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? (Psalm 27:1)
- But even the hairs of your head are all counted. Do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows. (Luke 12:7)
- But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from the evil one. (2 Thessalonians 3:3)
- There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. . . . (1 John 4:18)

WHEN FACING DISASTER

- [The LORD] said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” (Exodus 33:14)
- The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them. (Deuteronomy 33:27, KJV)

- As the mountains surround Jerusalem, so the LORD surrounds his people, from this time on and forevermore. (Psalm 125:2)
- For you shall not go out in haste, and you shall not go in flight; for the LORD will go before you, and the God of Israel will be your rear guard. (Isaiah 52:12)
- “. . . And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20*b*)

FOR GUIDANCE AND DIRECTION IN A CRISIS

- You show me the path of life. In your presence there is fullness of joy; in your right hand are pleasures forevermore. (Psalm 16:11)
- I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you. (Psalm 32:8)
- You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will receive me with honor. (Psalm 73:24*a*)
- The LORD will keep your going out and your coming in from this time on and forevermore. (Psalm 121:8)
- Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths. (Proverbs 3:5-6)
- I will go before you and level the mountains, I will break in pieces the doors of bronze and cut through the bars of iron. . . . (Isaiah 45:2)
- “When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come.” (John 16:13*a*)

NOTE: This kit seeks only to serve as a clearinghouse of useful information. Neither the author nor Judson Press claims to endorse the sites listed. To order copies of the book, contact Judson Press at 800-4-JUDSON or order online at www.judsonpress.com.