## Family Reunification[[1]](#footnote-1)

**Purpose:** After a major incident, the Reunification plan outlines the steps to ensure smooth and safe reunification of each child with their family, including backup tracking and checkout procedures (assuming loss of power, no access to facilities, etc.)

In the wake of an emergency or disaster, reunifying youth with their parents/guardians is a top priority. These considerations can help you create a reunification plan to be shared with staff and parents.

1. Work with the Emergency Management office to designate a specific location for children within mass assembly areas

* When identifying an area, you may want to consider:
  + an area that allows for multiple youth groups to congregate together
  + proximity to supplies and support
  + proximity (as is possible) to likely reunification points (for parents/guardians)
* Secondary assembly points should also be designated, in case the primary assembly point is inaccessible during an emergency.

1. Create signage to facilitate easy identification of youth by first responders and parents/guardians within mass assembly areas. Include sign-making supplies, or pre-made signs, in your emergency supply kit.
2. Reuniting parents and guardians with their children

* Create a plan to release the child to their parent/guardian
  + What documentation/identification is necessary to release a child to an adult?
  + Staff must document who the child left with: how and where will this information be collected?
  + If a child has been taken to receive first aid or other care somewhere else, a staff person should be designated to accompany them to that location. How will such designations/departures from the assembly point be communicated among staff?
* Minors age 16 and older may be allowed to leave independently once contact has been made with a parent or guardian and it has been determined the outside environment is safe for travel.
  + Will your program allow this? If so, how and where will these departures be documented?

1. Communication to parents and guardians with information on emergency response and reunification

* Communicate to parents in orientation/handbook about reunification location and procedures, including:
  + Procedure for releasing child to parent/guardian and necessary documentation to facilitate release
  + Expectations for experience at assembly points (e.g., traffic congestion, delays in reunification as staff follow procedures to ensure youth safety, etc.)
  + Communicate to parents in orientation/handbook about the main methods you will use for communication after an event
* Collect multiple modes of contact information from parents (phone numbers, email addresses, additional emergency contacts)
* Use more than one mode of communication to parents
  + Text, phone call or email to parents
  + Message left on a designated voicemail
  + Notification on program website (e.g., banner at top of page) and/or social media pages, as applicable
* Consider sending periodic updates to reassure parents of the well-being of their children during the post-emergency reunification process. Even if there is no news it can be helpful to communicate and let parents know that things are status quo.
  + Who and how should parents communicate to program staff or other emergency responders? Parents should not call Campus Police, as this may interfere with dispatch. Parents should be directed to only call 9-1-1 to report emergencies, not to request information.

1. Assign staff roles to support the reunification process in your emergency planning, and train staff accordingly.

**My Youth Program Reunification Plan:**

1. Adapted from University of Washington (2020) Youth Program Emergency Preparedness Plan; and FEMA (2013) [Post-Disaster Reunification of Children: A Nationwide Approach](https://www.ready.gov/sites/default/files/2019-06/post_disaster_reunification_of_children.pdf); examples taken from Seattle Children’s Hospital, U. of Louisville, Ohio U., Ohio State U., San Francisco USD, Louisiana State DCFS; and [CDC’s Caring for Children in a Disaster](http://www.cdc.gov/childrenindisasters/schools.html). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)