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# ARKANSAS CHILDREN'S DISASTER REUNIFICATION PLAN



**Guideline for agencies and organizations responsible for overseeing Children's Disaster Reunification Services.**



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# 1. INTRODUCTION

## *1.1 Purpose*

This Children's Disaster Reunification Plan (CDRP) defines the framework for State and Federal support of coordinated, timely, and efficient children's reunification efforts in Arkansas.

Even the smallest of disasters can result in confusion and separate families. The need to simplify communication between the State and its citizens to reunify these families is our priority. The CDRP has been developed as a collaborative strategy to manage and support activities and resources in all stages of a disaster in the impacted areas of the State. This CRDP centralizes communication between available local, State, Federal, and non-governmental agencies.

## *1.2 Scope*

The CDRP is necessary to meet the needs of the Arkansas population when affected by a disaster. In the event of a large scale or catastrophic incident local government, non-governmental organizations, and emergency dispatch centers may be overwhelmed with incoming calls. Emergency responders also will be affected and will seek information about their families, potentially before reporting for duty. Schools and childcare providers need to have emergency preparedness plans established with first responders and local emergency managers to better coordinate overall children's disaster reunification efforts.

During an emergency, evacuations and widespread communication disruptions can result in populations quickly retreating to safer locations. The threat of loved ones becoming separated, especially if the event occurs during the work or school day, is a real. The full spectrum of the CDRP services are defined under the roles and responsibilities, planning and preparedness, communication methods, and information collected sections within this booklet.

**Note:** The CDRP can be implemented by the State with, or without, Federal assistance.

# 2. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Agencies and organizations responsible for the temporary care of children (educational, child care, medical, juvenile justice and recreational facilities), to include guardianship of children separated from parents or legal guardians because of a disaster, and those overseeing children's disaster reunification efforts have clearly identified roles and responsibilities.

Initial response actions will be conducted by local jurisdictions and non-profit organizations (NGO's). When the combined resources of NGO's and impacted jurisdictions are insufficient the Department of Human Services, who serves as the lead agency for Emergency Support Function Six (ESF #6), will take action to secure the necessary resources from the State or the Federal government.

Mass casualty incidents will require enhanced coordination among children's disaster reunification operations, health care facilities and fatality management services. ESF #6 has the primary responsibility of delivering mass care/emergency support to local jurisdictions, minimize the humanitarian impact of disasters and other emergencies and coordinate the children's reunification effort.

A Mass Care Reunification Task Force (MCRTF) may be established under ESF #6 and utilized in accordance with the guidelines set forth in this plan to support functions instituted by the Arkansas Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (ARCEMP.)

*See Appendix C: Mass Care Reunification Task Force (MCRTF)*

## **2.1 Jurisdictional Requirements**

Whether a small localized event, or a large-scale emergency, Children's disaster reunification services will be needed in some capacity. In small incidents, needs will be met by the deployment of local jurisdiction personnel, from both governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). In larger or catastrophic incidents children's disaster reunification needs will exceed the resources and capability of any one agency or organization, requiring a combination of resources provided by Federal and State government, NGOs, and the private sector.

Under a Presidential declared emergency, the State may request Federal support through the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Region. This support may include:

- Technical help
- Activation of Federal resources and contracts
- Coordination of national resources when State and voluntary resources are insufficient to meet demand in disaster-impacted areas as supported under the Stafford Act, as Amended, April 2013, Sections 774 and 775.

Under the direction of the Governor, the Arkansas Department of Human Services is responsible for coordinating mass care efforts through the Emergency Support Function (ESF) and coordinating the CDRP within the State. The Governor's declaration of emergency is required to request a Presidential Declaration and Federal assistance in accordance with the Arkansas Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (ARCEMP).

Counties affected by incidents can request children's reunification help from the State for increased staff, equipment, and resources. Incidents where survivors are evacuated to other jurisdictions, joint coordination efforts will provide:

- Communication equipment at evacuation sites for survivor use
- Sharing of evacuee information collected through evacuation tracking systems
- Additional aid to support efficient children's reunification operations

All State or Federal children's reunification assets deployed must be coordinated through the Arkansas Department of Emergency Management (ADEM). Organizations participating in the CDRP will retain operational control of their assets and resources and cooperate with the NGO's operating in the area.

## ***2.2 Children's Disaster Reunification Support Teams***

A Children's Disaster Reunification Support Team (CRDST) is assembled at the request of the affected jurisdiction(s) and comprised of representatives from NGOs, State organizations and agencies (supplemented by local and/or Federal partners) engaged in children's disaster reunification efforts.

The CDRST works closely with local authorities to assess the children's disaster reunification needs and determine resources required to support CDRP efforts to reduce the number of separated, missing and unaccounted for children. CDRST members provide four basic functions:

- Conduct children's disaster reunification needs assessment(s)
- Facilitate access to children's disaster reunification systems
- Assist with children's reunification
- Deliver multi-agency information sharing support

Time is a crucial factor for identifying and deploying a CDRST and additional Federal resources may be requested. It is important to have a State representative as the team lead when Federal agencies support and/or participate on a CRDST.

Utilization of CDRST will depend upon the scale of the emergency. Special emphasis has been given to addressing disaster reunification needs of:

- Medically fragile children
- Children with disabilities
- Children with limited English proficiency

Reasonable accommodations to access children's disaster reunification services will be provided for individuals with disabilities seeking knowledge of children inside the impacted area.

## ***2.3 Nonprofit Organizations***

The American Red Cross, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) and other NGOs partners traditionally provide children's reunification support in accordance with their charter and emergency management officials. These agencies respond as needs are presented and often prior to the declaration under their own authorities. Local government officials provide CRDP guidance within their jurisdiction to NGO's providing aid.

## ***2.4 Whole Community***

Throughout this document the term "whole community" is used for consistency and clarity; use of the term is intended to align the CRDP with national doctrine as stated in the National Response Framework (NRF), as follows:

*"Engaging the whole community, particularly with regards to developing individual and community preparedness, is essential to the Nation's success in achieving resilience and national preparedness. By providing equal access to acquire and use the necessary knowledge and skills, this Framework is intended to enable the whole community to contribute to and benefit from national preparedness."*

*This includes children; older adults; individuals with disabilities and others with access and functional needs; those from religious, racial, and ethnically diverse backgrounds; people with limited English proficiency; and owners of animals, including household pets and service and assistance animals.*

*Emergency management staff must also consider those who own or have responsibility for animals, both as members of the community who may be affected by incidents and as a potential means of supporting response efforts.” (National Response Framework, July 2016)*

The success of children's reunification operations is dependent upon:

- (a) survivor access to communications to include telephone, cellular phones, and internet to connect with email, social media, and children's reunification systems
- (b) seamless coordination and the ability to share information among agencies and organizations with reunification responsibilities for evacuees and displaced adults, missing persons, disaster welfare inquiries, medical patients (to include those in facilities and those evacuated), and fatalities
- (c) timely and consistent public messaging to survivors and the public outside the disaster area on available children's reunification resources.

To account for all missing persons, whether alive, injured or deceased, we will effectively communicate and coordinate between multiple agencies and organizations, each of which will have responsibility for a different component of children's reunification. All agencies with a children's reunification responsibility are expected to participate in a collaborative manner.

### **3. PLANNING AND PREPAREDNESS**

#### ***3.1 Situation Summary***

When an incident occurs requiring children's disaster reunification support to be deployed it can be the result of a natural, man-made or technological emergency. Effective preparedness for special events such as large community or athletic events, marathons, and political gatherings may require a plan for children's reunification.

For any notice or no-notice event. located within one or multiple jurisdictions, the ESF #6 will develop a situation summary in coordination with the other stakeholders in accordance with the CDRP. may encompass

The Situation Summary will define:

- Evaluate scope and scale of disaster. Exceptionally large (even national) geographic areas may result in survivors being evacuated outside the disaster area.
- Determine resources required and available to implement children's disaster reunification methods
- Deploy available resources from the State or Federal Agencies, NGOs, and identify any deficits

*See Table. B-1. Estimating Disaster Levels of Impact for Use in Forecasting Mass Care Resources Appendix B  
See Table. B-2 Estimating Disaster Intensity for Use in Forecasting Children's Reunification Resources Appendix B  
See Table B-3. Intensity Factors and Children's Disaster Reunification Support Services Appendix B)*



See Appendix B: Estimating the Initial Children’s Disaster Reunification Services Requirements  
 See Appendix C: Mass Care Reunification Task Force (MCRTF) Guidance

### 3.2 Order of Operations

The children’s reunification phases are imbedded in the three Operational Phases. (Note: Elevated and Credible Threat phases may be omitted during a no notice event.)

<b>OPERATIONAL PHASES</b>			
<b><i>Normal Operations</i></b>	<b><i>Elevated Threat</i></b>	<b><i>Credible Threat</i></b>	<b><i>Recovery Operations</i></b>
Routine Disaster Preparedness, development of Family Communication Plans (FCP)	Situational Assessment and Notification to CDRP agencies.	Deployment of Resources and Incident Stabilization.	Continued Children’s Disaster Reunification Plan efforts.

❖ **Normal Operations** - Routine Disaster Preparedness - State agencies evaluate routine disaster preparedness. CDRP agreements are established between agencies and organizations detailing information sharing protocol in relation to missing persons, children, fatalities, and patients of Family Communication Plans (FCP) are development and promoted via public messaging in advance of a disaster.

❖ **Elevated Threat** - Situational Assessment and Notification – During this phase, all CRDP agencies will be notified of an elevated threat. Agencies with children’s reunification responsibilities will review plans and initiate contact with support organizations. Coordination efforts between all agencies will remain ongoing as assessment(s) of the situation are evaluated for continued or additional State and Federal support. External communication strategies will be determined.

❖ **Credible Threat** - Deployment of Resources and Incident Stabilization. Resources will be deployed to affected population re-establishing communication operations and registering families in children’s reunification databases begins. This phase may be supported with State resources and capabilities, additional resources during this phase may include:

- Deployment of National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) resources
- FEMA’s National Emergency Family Registry and Locator System (NEFRS)
- Children’s Reunification Support Teams.

See Appendix E: Children’s Reunification Resources  
 See Appendix J: Reunification and Evacuation Tracking Systems

❖ **Recovery Operations** - Continued Children’s Disaster Reunification efforts and individual unresolved cases are transitioned to local agencies. The effects of separation may result in a need for behavioral health support. This phase will provide long-term support and crisis counseling for child disaster survivors and workers providing children’s disaster reunification services.



## **4. COMMUNICATION METHODS**

### ***4.1 Effective Communication***

Public communication involves the use of traditional communications, social media, and CDRP technology. To provide effective communications, both internal and external, requires seamless coordination among providers; sharing of information; survivor access to communications vehicles; and timely and consistent public messaging.

### ***4.2 Internal Communication***

Internal communication occurs primarily among whole community providers (e.g., government agencies at all levels, NGOs, faith-based organizations, private sector) to share data, coordinate services, avoid duplication of efforts, and maximize the opportunity for successful children's reunifications.

**Note:** All agencies sharing information via evacuation tracking systems must participate in data sharing agreements and will be subject to applicable privacy laws.

### ***4.3 External Communication***

Providing survivor (both children and parent/guardian) access to communications, such as phone/cellular service, social media, and internet, is our primary goal. Coordination amongst agencies to provide equipment and communication services is essential. Survivor ability to utilize communications quickly reduces the need for ongoing children's reunification services.

Children's reunification or Missing Children/Persons Call Centers, the Multi-Agency Coordination Center (R-MACC) and the Family Assistance Center (FAC) are important coordinative and communication bridges to both internal and external communications.

### ***4.4 Public Messaging***

The State Mass Care Coordinator or designee will coordinate through a Joint Information Center (JIC) to ensure public messages include coordinated, accurate and timely information about children's reunification tools and services available. The national media must be notified about children's reunification services during large scale incidents to promote information sharing to people outside the disaster area seeking news about family and friends impacted by the incident.

Public messaging can include:

- Information about available children's reunification registries that can be used by survivors and those looking for information about loved ones
- Reminders to the survivors to contact family and friends via text, telephone and/or social media sites with status information
- Locations such as family help centers, shelters, and service delivery sites, where children's reunification services may be provided

- Information for institutions such as nursing homes, assisted living facilities, child care, educational, juvenile justice, medical and recreational facilities using children's reunification registries to let family members know the status and location of clients/students after a disaster and in cases of evacuation
- Appropriate phone numbers to call such as reunification call center number, especially when dispatch centers are overwhelmed with calls from those seeking information about missing/unaccompanied children.

All public message information must be available in accessible formats and shared among agencies and organizations, including social media providers.

Any accessible social media applications survivors utilize to post status updates, or obtain family contact information, is an asset to children's disaster reunification efforts. When survivors do not have access to communications, cell phones and other electronic equipment, especially in a catastrophic disaster, use of social media may not be possible resulting in delayed unification endeavors.

## **5. Information Collection**

The State Mass Care Coordinator or designee will detail the type of children's reunification information they require and frequency of reporting. They will also share relevant information with the children's reunification providers to maintain accurate and up-to-date situational awareness. Lastly, they will provide information on the meetings and conference calls and specify reporting requirements for support agencies.

### ***5.1 Tracking and Reports***

Information tracking and reports will be utilized to plan for the types of services and programs needed to support the disaster survivors. These formats will support the status of children's reunification methods utilized, support team activities, active children's reunification systems and the number of calls received.

### ***5.2 Privacy***

Children's reunification activities require the collection, and sharing, of survivor's personal information amongst governmental agencies and disaster relief organizations. Entities responsible for children's reunification planning should be aware of individual privacy rights and applicable privacy laws.