

## Prepare kids for emergencies

During summer, kids may spend a lot of time with grandparents, aunts, uncles or other older family members. It's a fun time, but it has the potential to become dangerous if the older adult suffers an emergency. After all, older adults are more at-risk for strokes, falls and other serious issues. And while children might know what to do in an emergency at home, they may be lost in a different setting. They may not know where the first aid kit is located or where to reunite with family in an emergency.

### Common problems

Leslie Ingold is a longtime nurse and stroke coordinator at OSF HealthCare who speaks to youth groups often about spotting stroke signs. The acronym to remember is BEFAST. If the person has irregularities in balance, eyes, face, arms or speech, call 9-1-1 immediately.

The concept can apply broadly to emergencies involving older adults when kids are the only ones nearby.

If a grandparent looks weak or just isn't acting right, kids should be trained to ask: Are your arms numb? Does your neck, jaw or chest hurt? Can you breathe?

"Those are big warning signs. Those don't happen very often," Ingold says. "When those things come on suddenly, red flags should go up, and 9-1-1 should be called."

Kids visiting an older relative should also keep their play areas tidy to avoid trip hazards for the adult. Falls can cause serious injuries like broken bones and head trauma which could lead to a bleeding stroke.

Video game consoles with cords should be put away when not in use. Same for toys in a playroom, garage or backyard. Kids should stay out of the kitchen when adults are handling hot or sharp items. The adult could trip over the youngster's foot and get burned or cut.

"Another big trip hazard is an area rug," Ingold adds. "Especially if they use a device like a cane or walker. Even though they're meant for balance, you still may get caught on a threshold."

If a child sees an older adult on the floor and unable to get up, they should know to call 9-1-1 right away. If an adult has been in another room for a while, go check to make sure they are okay.

### Calling for help

A big piece of advice from Ingold to families: write down vital information and put it by the most accessible phone (sometimes this is a land line phone) in case a child needs to dial 9-1-1. Include names and ages of everyone in the home, any unique health information for those people, phone numbers and the home address. If the child is older and carries a cellphone, have them put it in the Notes app.

"Kids are really good at remembering their home address, phone number and where they are in the neighborhood," Ingold recalls from her years of educating young people on strokes. "But when they get out of the comfort zone and go to a relative or babysitter's house, they're not familiar. It's not something they've learned."

Walk through with your child how to call 9-1-1 and what to say to the dispatcher. Explain that first responders are there to help.

"Kids shouldn't be afraid to call for help," Ingold says. "They shouldn't be afraid that a dispatcher will say 'are you teasing me? Is this a prank call?'"

You might even see if your local fire station or ambulance service offers tours so your child can become familiar with the vehicles and their noises.

Ingold adds: teach children how to unlock the home's front door so first responders can get to the injured adult quickly. And kids should stay with the senior until help arrives. But if there are multiple kids in the home, one can go and alert a neighbor.

**How to teach**

Ingold admits all this is a heavy topic and a lot for a young person to learn. That's why you have to take great care when teaching. Ingold will often start with a coloring activity that has nothing to do with the topic at hand. Then, meet the young people where they are. The American Heart Association has a music video about BEFAST, for example. Remind kids that this is all about keeping family and friends safe.