



## Leveraging Child Care Consumer Education Websites During Emergencies and Disasters

This tip sheet is designed to help states and territories leverage child care consumer education websites to communicate critical information to families, providers, and the general public during times of emergencies and disasters.

### Share Useful, Timely Content

**Focus on the needs of your audience. Post information that families and providers need or want most.**

- ◆ Develop and share relevant content. Listen to questions asked in community forums, received through your call center, and on social media. Develop content that addresses those concerns. Information changes rapidly and so must the content. For example, parents may have questions regarding whether their child care provider is open or they may have questions about the status of their child care subsidy. Providers may have questions regarding interim regulation changes that might impact their day-to-day operations and staffing. They may also have questions about how to document care being provided to families eligible for subsidy in order to get reimbursed.
- ◆ Get feedback: Consider working with a select group of stakeholders to identify what type of content may be useful to share. Validate that the content you prepare for posting is clear and understandable.

**Ensure users can immediately find critical information once they visit your website.**

- ◆ Use color, font, and placement to ensure vital information can be found easily on the page.
- ◆ Consider using banners or headers in a bold color to draw attention to critical information.
- ◆ Ensure users can access critical information easily from other pages within your site so that they see it even if they access a landing page versus the main home page.

**Format and write user-friendly content to ensure understanding.**

- ◆ Format content to facilitate understanding even if users only scan the page.
  - Use descriptive headers and titles.
  - Use a visual hierarchy to organize text. Ensure that information is organized in clear, precise categories.



- ◆ Make sure your content is user-friendly.
  - Use plain language. For example, avoid using complicated technical phrases, scientific or medical terms, acronyms, and jargon. Instead, use words that are short, simple, and commonly understood.
  - Provide clear and concise summaries for emergency orders and official memos.
  - Highlight key points in a manner that all user groups will understand.

## Coordinate information sharing to avoid confusion.

- ◆ Avoid duplication of effort and resources. Consider sharing only child care specific updates on your consumer education website. Route users to appropriate resources to ensure they can access the most up-to-date information from the most relevant and trusted source. For example, for public health updates, route users to your state public health website and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). For information about emergency response, route users to your state emergency management page and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA).
- ◆ Support coordination: Collaborate with key partners on communications to ensure consistent messaging across individual pages and platforms.

## Be timely: Provide regular and consistent updates on a predictable schedule.

- ◆ Timestamp all updates. Consider providing a scrolling feed or information page where users can see communications and updates outlined in the order they were released. Organize your feed so that the most recent updates are listed first for easy reference.
- ◆ Communicate regularly and clearly. Be responsive to concerns and dispel rumors as they surface.
- ◆ Consider your tone. Disasters and emergencies can be a source of anxiety. A measured, timely, and considerate response can go a long way toward reassuring your audience during a crisis.

### Do you have more questions?

If you would like additional technical assistance on developing and enhancing your consumer education website, email the Child Care State Capacity Building Center at [CapacityBuildingCenter@icf.com](mailto:CapacityBuildingCenter@icf.com).

## Promote Your Resources

### Make sure your audience can find your website and resources.

Your audience should be able to find your emergency preparedness, readiness, and recovery information quickly.

- ◆ Consider how your audience may access your consumer education website. For example, determine whether they will go directly to it or access it from another site, such as the child care resource and referral site, subsidy page, or partner website. Make sure there are links to your consumer education website on these related sites.
- ◆ Make sure your audience can find your consumer education website easily when they use an online search engine. See the Child Care State Capacity Building Center's [Guide for Increasing Search Engine Optimization](#)



(2019). It includes relatively simple ways to format your website content and technical aspects of your website so that search engines will be able to do the following: match your website to user's online search criteria, and display your website more prominently on search engine results.

## Use social media.

In times of emergency, people increasingly turn to social media for accessing information. You can use social media to share key information and direct your audience directly to your emergency and disaster preparedness tools and resources. For more information, see the Child Care State Capacity Building Center's [Social Media Strategies to Support Child Care Consumer Education Websites](#) (2019).

- ◆ Communicate proactively and regularly. Be prepared for predictable emergencies, such as during flu, hurricane, tornado, wildfire, and snowstorm seasons. By preparing some post content in advance for seasonal emergencies, you will have content that is ready to share, which also frees staff to be more responsive during unpredictable emergencies.
- ◆ Vary your posting types. Provide calls to action, polls, updates, and sources of inspiration. This approach will allow you to provide critical updates, set a calm and inspiring tone, and help people feel invested in your content.
- ◆ Use a clear management process to avoid making errors and sharing inaccurate content. Consider adding an extra layer of posting approvals as well as review and monitoring steps. Ensure the process still allows for timely posting of critical information.
- ◆ Be selective with shares. Only share information from reliable, agency-approved sources.
- ◆ Highlight your key partners. Share successes, helpful resources, and new information as it becomes available.

## Remember Accessibility

Use the Child Care State Capacity Building Center's guide for [Designing Websites That Are Accessible for All Families](#) (2019) to help ensure that all users have equal access to critical information in times of emergency. The following are recommendations:

- ◆ To effectively serve all segments of your target audience, you should provide translated information and resources in the core languages spoken by your audience.
- ◆ Use plain language and short concise sentences and paragraphs. This helps facilitate translation and supports the use of screen readers for users with low or no vision.
- ◆ Make sure your website is formatted to support the use of screen readers.
  - Ensure each posted image has an alt-tag that provides a simple description of the image so that a screen reader can read it.
  - Do not include images with embedded text.
  - Use hierarchical structures, bullets, and whitespace to support the use of screen readers.
- ◆ Make sure documents available for download are formatted to support accessibility. Microsoft PowerPoint, Word, and PDF files have features to make them accessible.



- ◆ Ensure your updates are mobile friendly.
- ◆ Be sure to address special populations and how your agency plans to support them. For more information, see the Child Care State Capacity Building Center's [How States and Territories Prepare to Support Special Populations in Emergencies and Disasters](#) (2017).

## Additional Resources

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (n.d.). Gateway to health communication: Your one-stop shop for health communication [Web page, last reviewed March 20, 2020] Retrieved March 23, 2020, from <https://www.cdc.gov/healthcommunication/>

Child Care State Capacity Building Center. (2020). *Resource guide: Emergency preparedness, response, and recovery resources for child care programs*. Washington, DC: Office of Child Care. Retrieved from <https://childcareta.acf.hhs.gov/sites/default/files/public/rg5eemergencyprepandresponse.pdf>