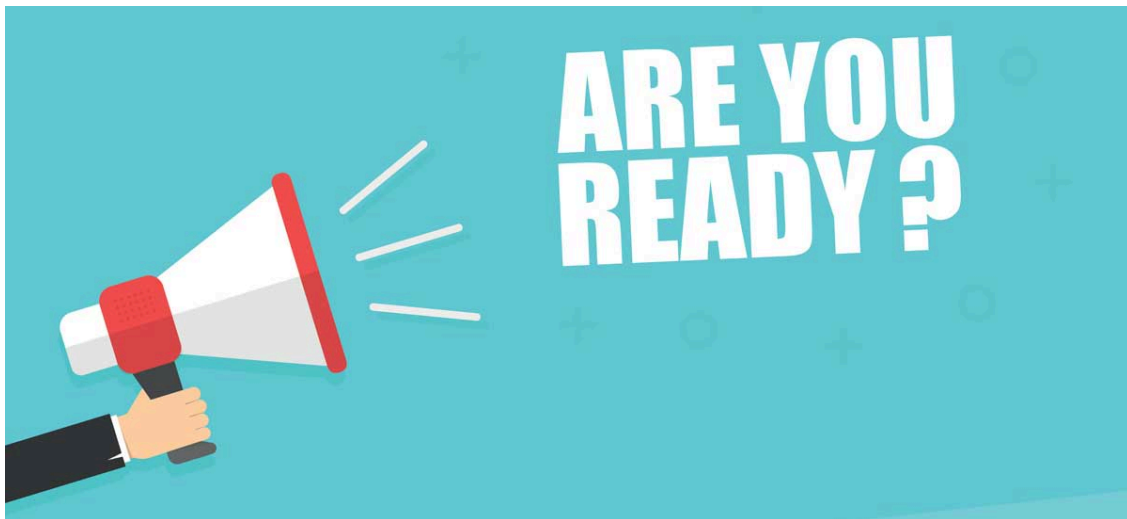


How Do We Stay Prepared For The Unforeseen?

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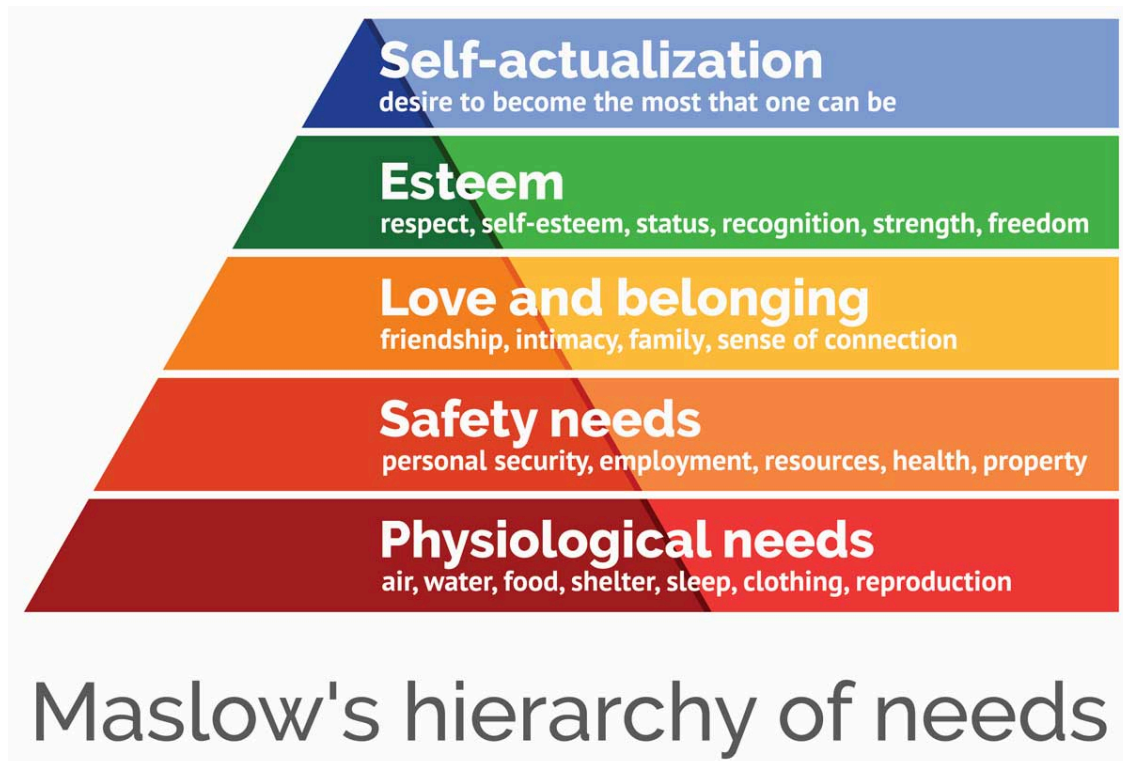
by Jill F Whitfield, CNM, MSN

As we reminisce about recent very severe weather and environmental challenges in our county and around the world, we know that anything can happen quickly. We may not have days or weeks to prepare. From the horrible hurricane damage in the Southeast, the fires in California, or the recent freeze in the South, we are not immune to challenges and true disasters.

We were recently literally “snowed and iced in” for 6 days. We live on an island. It rained for 24 hours with the temperatures in the “20’s” and formed at least a 2-inch sheet of ice and then it snowed. We had 6 inches of snow on top of the ice, and we were in our house for the next 5 days. Our one low level bridge, the very tall bridge over the Intercoastal Waterway and the causeway were all frozen over so therefore closed to any vehicular travel on or off the island. Fortunately, we did not lose power but had firewood positioned by the back door and ample fuel for the full house generator.

Those folks, on the front lines, may be called “up” in a disaster setting, to report to our hospitals, workplaces or agencies. We/they may have to leave our families behind. We may be fortunate enough to remain at home or relocate to another safer area. We may not have time to relocate or be unable to relocate. There are many scenarios that we must consider and rehearse, “just in case”. One thing we must never do is become complacent.

During any sort of a challenge such as (but not limited to) hurricanes, tornadoes, fires, floods, epidemics/pandemics, or loss of employment, we go into crisis and survival mode. Our adrenaline starts to flow but we all know adrenaline is a short acting phenomenon. It does not last forever. So, we must be as prepared as possible well before the event to lessen the stress on our psychological and physical self. We just never know when a disaster can strike.



If we look at Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, we see that the very bottom rung of the pyramid is "Physiological Needs". This is food, water, shelter, warmth and rest. These are the very basic of human needs and are meant to keep us alive. This is basic survival. In a crisis, this is where we find ourselves. The next rung is safety and security. We cannot move up until all these initial needs are met. I will base this basic discussion on the very bottom rung: "Food, Water, Shelter, Warmth and Rest".

Here are some basic ideas:

Be prepared always.

We probably do not need to turn into the Doomsday Preppers, however none of us are immune from a pending disaster, so we need a "plan". Families must make their own individual plan(s) and in advance. Please have a family conference, ask "what do we need, on hand, to make XXXX happen?" Make the plan, write it down and slowly implement the plan. The problem with waiting until the disaster strikes is shortages, crowds and potential chaos.

Another consideration is that we live under a system called “just in time delivery”. Stores do not have big storerooms anymore. They keep enough on hand to stock their shelves with a small buffer. They order what they need to replace what is sold and it comes in a day or two in a big truck. Then, they restock. They may eventually, over time, depend totally on back orders, delays and shortages. Not good. The shelves will be empty quickly. And people panic.

Money: Have an emergency fund. Most experts encourage that everyone have a 3–6-month fund, saved, to sustain you and pay your bills during the time of crisis. This takes time, for most people, but can be done by diligently adding, what you can, to this fund regularly. This money is not to be tapped except for the emergencies listed above. Make sure you have some cash on hand, in a safe place, in case banks are not a possibility.

Food.

Think about a 3-month “working pantry”. A working pantry is a pantry that you eat and cook out of all the time. When you use something, you simply replace it. The way to get started is to list all the things that your family normally eats. Don’t stock things you or your family will never eat as it is a waste of money. Do some math and figure out how much of an individual item you would use/eat in one month. For example, if you use one can or one box of something every week, then you would need 4 of those for the month. Slowly, as your finances permit, build that item to your full month supply and simply replace it when you use it. After a while, build toward your 2, then 3-month pantry over time when you have extra money or as items/products go on sale. This takes a bit of discipline, but it pays off in the long run as you will always have food on hand. You will never be standing in lines in the supermarket during a crisis.

Let’s talk staples, what exactly are staples? Staples are a must. These are basic food items, usually dry or canned goods, that are needed to make everything else you have work for you. They can be used separately or in conjunction with most everything else for survival. These would include (but not limited to): Flour, Corn Meal, Rice, Pasta, Sugar, Salt, Spices, Rolled Oats, Baking Powder, Baking Soda, Dried Beans, Dried Peas, Lentils, Popcorn, Oils, Vinegar, Honey, Mayonnaise, Mustard, Nut Butters, Herbs/Spices, Powdered/Canned Milk and Canned goods (i.e. vegetables, fruit and meat). Wet goods would include (would need refrigeration) fresh milk, eggs, butter, yogurt, cheese and fresh/frozen vegetables and meat. You can see that, except for the wet foods, most of the fore-mentioned foods will last a long time if stored appropriately and

rotated. Again, remember, with a working pantry, you are not hoarding this food, you are using it and replacing it.

Please include household/personal products to your list as well, such as pet food, cleaning supplies, detergent, toilet tissue, paper towels, facial tissue, disinfectant wipes, hand sanitizer, bar soap, liquid hand soap, shampoo, deodorant, feminine hygiene products, disposable diapers, a first aid kit and over the counter medications. You should never have to run, in a mad dash, to the store in a crisis. You can collect these things over time, as you can afford it or when you catch them on sale. We all must make this a priority because, as we have discovered, it can happen at any time.

Water.

We can live a lot longer without food than we can without water. This MUST be a huge priority. You must prepare for one gallon of water, per person, per day. This includes drinking and simple basic hygiene (if the water goes off). You can do this by saving water in the blue 5-gallon jugs that can be purchased at any home improvement store and storing them in a safe place. These jugs can be refilled and last for many years. Hang on to your bleach jugs as this is a good and cheap alternative to store water. Buying cases of bottled water may not be cost effective over time, so gallon jugs may be less expensive. We also must think about waste management in a crisis as well during these times. Where will all that plastic go if we do not have waste management coming to our back door or no recycling centers?

Shelter.

What is the plan? Explore these questions, at your family conference:

a) What if we must evacuate (hurricane, flooding, etc.): Where will we go? What will we take with us? Is our vehicle dependable? Do we keep the tank full? Do we have emergency money? What about the pets?

b) If we "must shelter in place: Do we have a working, stocked pantry? Do we have enough water?

c) What will we need to meet our physical/medical needs? Is a family member on prescription medications? How will we get more medication, if we need it? Do we need our medical and immunizations records?

d) Do you have elderly family members? What is the plan for them?

e) Are we prepared to be without electricity, water, electronics, trash removal? What will we do to pass the time? Will we be warm or cool enough?

f) Do we need to organize our legal documents, wills, passports, insurance

policies (self and property), insurance cards, records, etc.? Do we keep these in a safe place that is readily available?

As you can see, there is a lot to think about and there is no way to cover all aspects of preparing here. This is food for thought. There have been many books written on the subject so I would recommend further reading. I hope this introduction to preparation and the importance in getting your entire family involved is helpful. The time to get started is now. Don't wait.

Please be prepared, be smart, be educated, be calm and stay safe!!



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