

Practice Makes Perfect

Sometimes things that look good on paper are disasters in reality. Practice escape plans to ensure they work. In a house fire, uncertainty is deadly. Practice escaping until crawling outside in the dark is second nature.



Map It Out

Draw an outline map of your home or apartment. It doesn't matter if the proportions are not exact. Include all of the major features: bedrooms, stairs, hallways, doors, and windows. Add important outdoor features, such as rooftops, trees, or other potential fire escapes. Choose a safe meeting place a short distance from your home, and show it on the plan.

Mark normal exits on the map in one color. Mark a second exit from each room in a different color.



Reality Check

Once you have drawn up your plan, make sure the parts work:

- Test your windows. Do they open easily? They also must be large and low enough for people to get through.
- Can security bars be opened quickly, without a key?
- Have you installed fire escape ladders in one window of each second floor bedroom or made some other safe plan?
- Is one able-bodied adult assigned to help each very young child or disabled person to escape?
- Test your smoke alarms monthly.
- Adjust your plan as needed.



Drill Set-up

Your safe escape plan is in place. Everyone knows exactly what to do if there is a fire. You have checked the plan to see that it should work well. The only thing left to do is PRACTICE the plan.

Your plan is most likely to work if everyone knows his or her part in it very, very well.

One person should be responsible for running fire drills (the drill monitor). The monitor should choose surprise drill times when everyone is at home. Have fire drills every few months to make for a smooth, quick escape in a real emergency.



Basic Fire Drills

The monitor begins the drill by sounding the smoke alarm, using the test button.

The practice escape begins immediately. Exit quickly, but carefully. The last thing you want during a drill is an injury. Still, try to complete the escape in 3 to 5 minutes.

If the drill is being conducted during sleep hours, bedroom doors should be closed. A solid wooden door may block flames for up to fifteen minutes.

For some drills, the monitor should mark off exits as out of bounds. Put "hot door" or "smoke and flames" signs on primary exits so that people will have to practice using backup exits.



When You Hear the Alarm

- If asleep, roll out of bed and stay below smoke and gasses that could kill you.
- Don't waste time dressing or looking for valuables or pets.
- Crawl quickly to the door, keeping your head 12-24 inches above the floor, below deadly smoke.
- Use the back of your hand to feel the door for heat. If you feel heat on the door, hinges, or doorknob, don't open it! Crawl to your second way out.
- If the door is cool, brace yourself, and open it slowly. Peek out to look for smoke and flames. If clear, crawl quickly toward the exit. In a dark drill, feel your way along the walls. Count the doors as you go.
- Go directly to the safe meeting place.
- One person goes to a neighbor's house to call the fire department.
- Once you are outside, stay out!
- After the drill, have a family meeting. What went well? Were there problems? Practice the plan again, making corrections.





Plan to Live

Don't worry about what would happen if your home caught fire; **plan** to save your family's lives.

The first step is taking stock of the layout of your home, fire dangers, and fire safety features. For example, you need at least one smoke alarm on each level of your home, plus one in each sleeping area. Test smoke alarms monthly and change batteries twice a year.

The next step is drawing up a workable, safe escape plan. When you make your plan, think about the age and strength of each family member. The disabled, elderly, or very young will need extra help.

The plan needs to show two exits from each room. In most cases, one exit will be a window. Consider buying fire-resistant escape ladders for second floor bedrooms. Security bars need to be the quick-release type. Allow for your unique circumstances in your safe escape plan.

The final — and critical — step is practicing that plan until it is second nature. Home fire drills teach you the skills you need to survive a fire.



Survive a House Fire: A Checklist

- New smoke alarm batteries twice yearly.
- Sleep with bedroom doors closed.
- Crawl low under smoke.
- Know two ways out of every room.
- If you are on fire, Stop, Drop, and Roll.
- Practice your escape plan often.
- Out of a burning building? Stay out!

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Home Fire Drills

Practice
For
Survival

