

# National Center for Disaster Preparedness

EARTH INSTITUTE | COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

RESILIENT  
CHILDREN  
RESILIENT  
COMMUNITIES



## CHILDREN IN DISASTERS: DO AMERICANS FEEL PREPARED?

A National Survey

BRIEFING REPORT NO.1  
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# ABOUT THE RESILIENT CHILDREN, RESILIENT COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE

Many communities, systems, and child-serving institutions are not sufficiently prepared to meet the needs of children when a crisis strikes. A community's ability to rebound from a crisis can be measured by its effectiveness in caring for its children, who are among the most vulnerable populations in an emergency. Strengthening the community institutions that serve children will help enable families and communities to reduce the lasting impact of disasters.

The three-year Resilient Children/Resilient Communities Initiative (RCRC) will develop a scalable and replicable model of child-focused community resilience to be led by child-serving institutions. This is being accomplished by developing two pilot programs – one in Washington County, Arkansas, and one in Putnam County, New York. In partnership with leaders in these communities, this initiative will analyze, recommend and implement procedures, trainings, and guidance to help communities protect children after disasters. Initiative impact will be measured using the Community Preparedness Index (CPI), an evidence-based measure of community preparedness previously developed by Save the Children in collaboration with the National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP) at the Earth Institute, Columbia University. For more information, please visit <http://ncdp.columbia.edu/rcrc>.

*The Resilient Children/Resilient Communities (RCRC) Initiative, led by the National Center for Disaster Preparedness at Columbia University's Earth Institute and Save the Children, is funded by a grant from GSK.*

## ABOUT THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR DISASTER PREPAREDNESS, EARTH INSTITUTE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

The National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP) works to understand and improve the nation's capacity to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. NCDP focuses on the readiness of governmental and non-governmental systems; the complexities of population recovery; the power of community engagement; and the risks of human vulnerability, with a particular focus on children.

## ABOUT SAVE THE CHILDREN

Save the Children invests in childhood – every day, in times of crisis, and for our future. In the United States and around the world, we are dedicated to ensuring every child has the best chance for success. Our pioneering programs give children a healthy start, the opportunity to learn, and protection from harm. Our advocacy efforts provide a voice for children who cannot speak for themselves. As the leading expert on children, we inspire and achieve lasting impact for millions of the world's most vulnerable girls and boys. By transforming children's lives now, we change the course of their future and ours. Learn more about our Get Ready Get Safe preparedness initiative at [www.SavetheChildren.org/GetReady](http://www.SavetheChildren.org/GetReady).

# study & METHODOLOGY

## About the Study

This study was led by the National Center for Disaster Preparedness (NCDP) at Columbia University's Earth Institute on behalf of the Resilient Children/Resilient Communities (RCRC) Initiative, in partnership with Save the Children with funding from GSK. The purpose of the study was to learn more about people's opinions and attitudes toward disaster preparedness with a focus on children in disasters. The national survey of American households was conducted in December 2015. Eligible participants were 18 years of age or older, and included participants, with or without children, in their household. Many of the families surveyed had children in a K-12 school or in daycare.

## Methodology

NCDP designed and deployed this national survey modeled on prior work through the American Preparedness Project (<http://ncdp.columbia.edu/research/preparedness-attitudes-behaviors>), which collected national data on attitudes and opinions on preparedness to acts of terrorism as well as general preparedness attitudes and behaviors from 2002 - 2011.

This deployment highlighted attitudes on preparedness for children in disasters as part of the Resilient Children/Resilient Communities Initiative (<http://ncdp.columbia.edu/rcrc>).

This anonymous survey utilized a 10-15 minute questionnaire. The random digit dial survey was fielded by Edison Research, a professional survey research center. The questionnaire was administered to 1,048 households nationally. Approximately 45% of the sample was composed of cellular phone lines, with the remainder being traditional land lines. The sample was also weighted by sex, age, race, and region to represent the U.S. population per the 2010 U.S. Census. The margin of error on the total sample was +/- 3%. The survey was administered between November 30, 2015 and December 14, 2015.

It should be noted that this survey was deployed less than three weeks after the November 13, 2015 terrorist attacks on Paris, France. The attack on San Bernardino, CA on December 2, 2015 also occurred during data collection for this survey.

Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding. "Unsure/Don't Know," "Refused," and "Not Applicable" responses were aggregated if the number of respondents amounted to less than 5% of the total.

# KEY FINDINGS

Findings from this national survey have identified important insights into the lack of preparedness among American households as well as a lack of progress in integrating families and children into community disaster planning. Some improvement is noted for trended questions like personal preparedness and trust in the government to respond adequately. However this improvement is marginal and still presents a lack of trust in authorities and communities and a general lack of adoption of preparedness among individuals and households. Key findings include:

- American household preparedness has improved only modestly since 2003. Nearly two thirds (65%) of American households do not have adequate plans for a disaster or have no plans at all (compared to 77% without adequate plans in 2003).
- Although Americans are in general confident in their community's ability to respond to disasters, 41% are not confident that their community has adequate plans in place for a disaster that occurs with no warning and 37% are not confident in their community's ability to meet the needs of children during disasters.
- Over a third of American households with children (35%) are not familiar with their child's school evacuation and emergency plans, and even more (41%) do not know to what location their children would be evacuated to during a disaster.
- In the event of a disaster, over half (51%) of Americans believe that help will arrive in under an hour.
- Individuals have high expectations for rapidly being reunited with their children and anticipate schools reopening quickly after a disaster. Over half (54%) believe that they will be reunited with their children within several hours. Additionally, over 40% expect that schools will resume within a week after a major disaster.

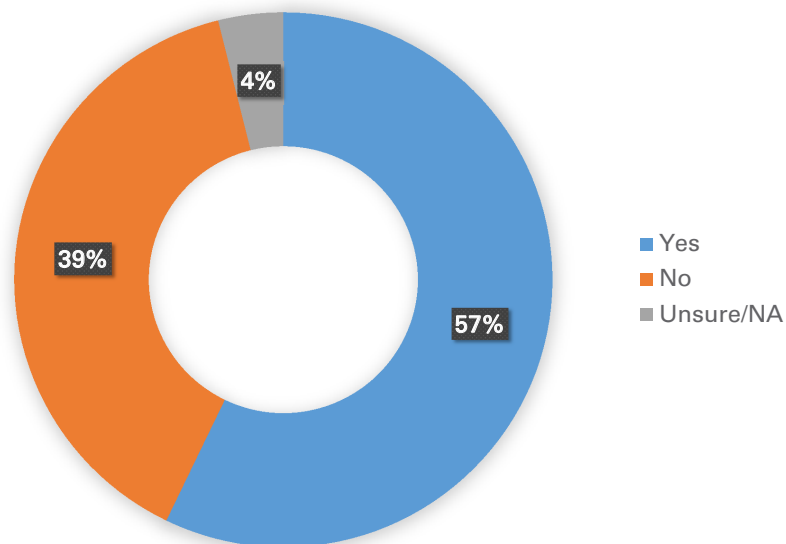
# household PREPAREDNESS

Do you feel that your household is ready for a disaster, or not?

- 57.1% of people said that their household was ready for a disaster.

Figure 1

% of population reporting disaster readiness





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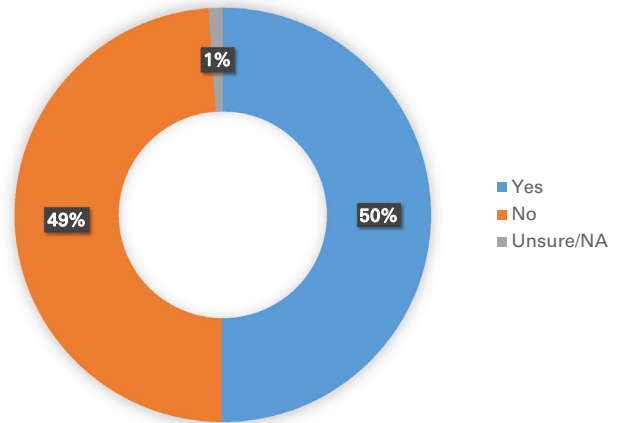
# household PREPAREDNESS

## Do you have a family emergency preparedness plan that all family members know about?

- Only half of the population reports having a family emergency preparedness plan that all family members know about.

Figure 2

% of population reporting having a family emergency preparedness plan

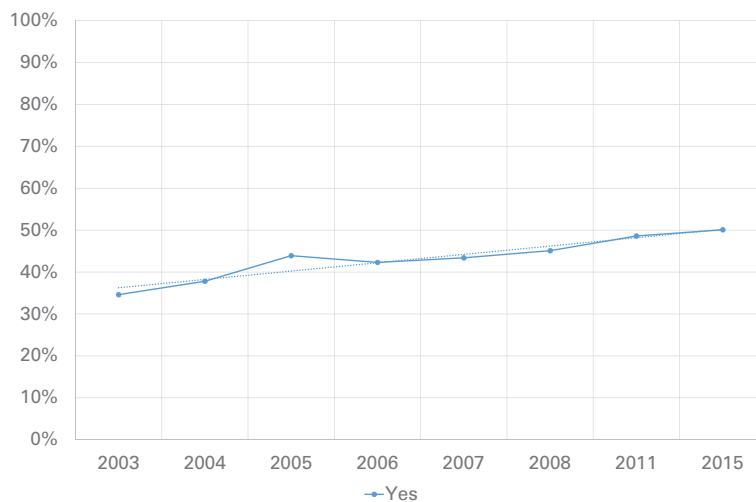


- Over the past 12 years, the number of households with family emergency preparedness plans has been rising slowly but steadily and has increased by over 15% since 2003.

Figure 3

% of population reporting having a family emergency preparedness plan over time.

The dotted line depicts the linear trend over time. The straight line depicts observed data collected in previous years.



cont'd

# household PREPAREDNESS

Does your family emergency preparedness plan include all, some, or none of the following: at least two days of food and water, a flashlight, a portable radio and spare batteries, emergency phone numbers, and a meeting place for family members in case of evacuation?

- Of households with a family emergency preparedness plan in place (n=525), 68% reported having at least two days of food and water, a flashlight, a portable radio and spare batteries, emergency phone numbers, and a meeting place for family members in case of evacuation. A little over 2% had none of the above.

- The percentage of households with family emergency preparedness plans in place including all necessary items has improved modestly time. However, 65% of American households still don't have an adequate plan including all necessary items, or have no plan at all.

Figure 4

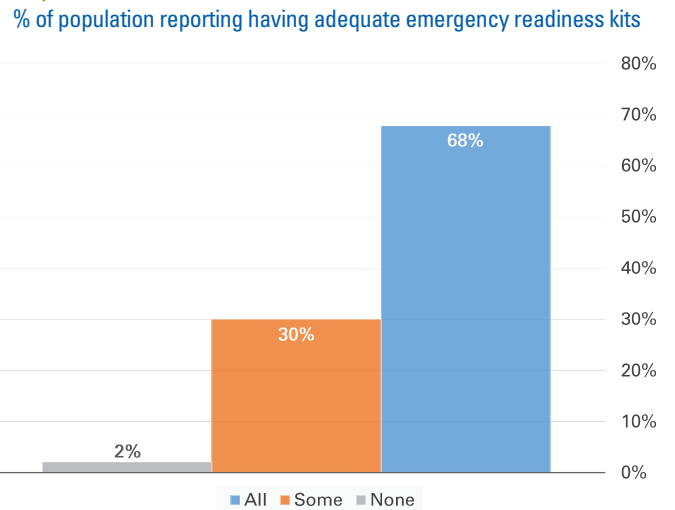
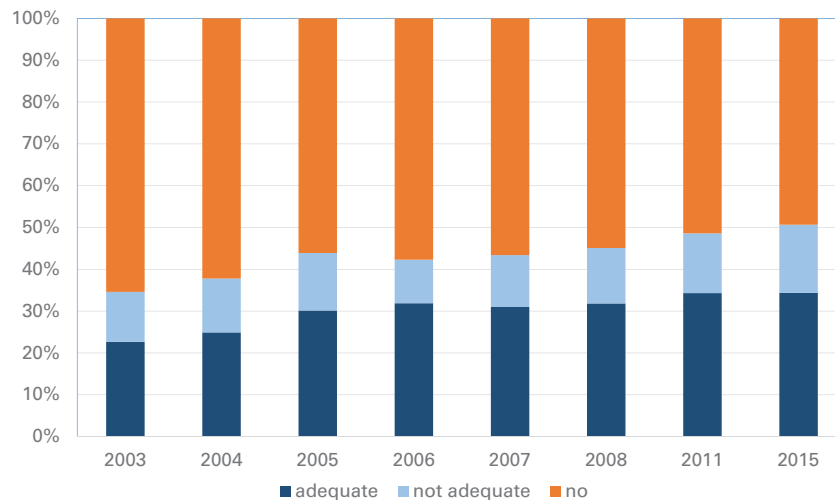


Figure 5

% of population reporting having either no, inadequate, or adequate readiness plan and kit over time



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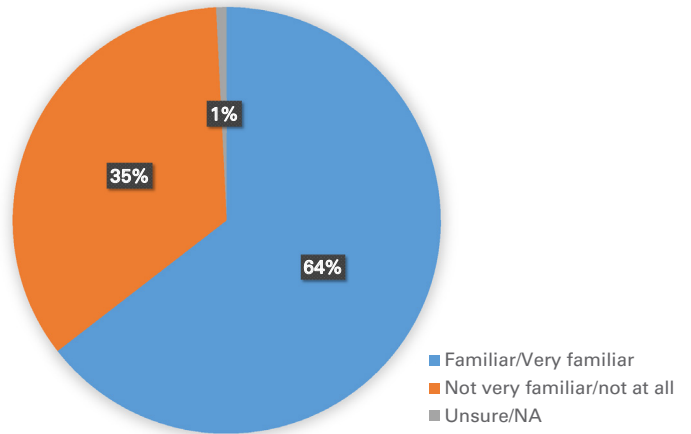
# household PREPAREDNESS

How familiar are you with the emergency or evacuation plan at your child or children's daycare or school? (Answered by survey participants with children in school or daycare)

- Of the households reporting children in school or daycare (n=365), 64% were familiar or very familiar with the emergency or evacuation plan at their child or children's daycare or school, while nearly 35% were not very familiar, or not familiar at all.

Figure 6

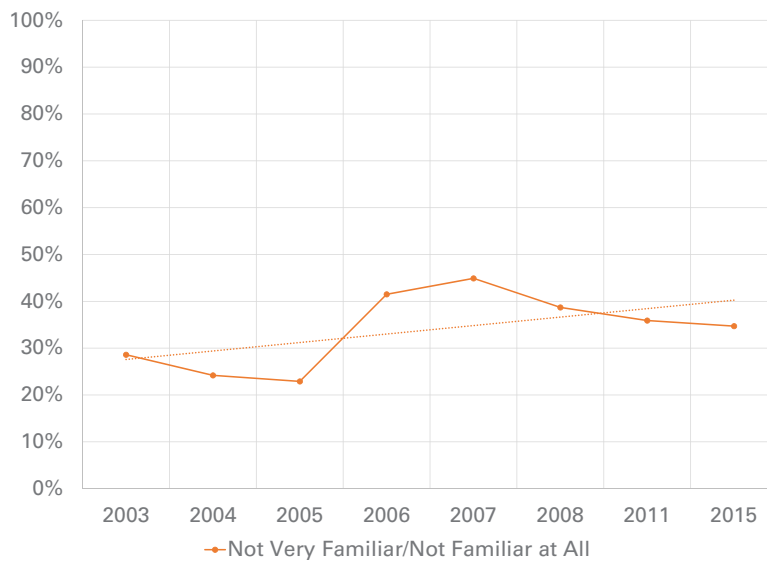
% of population reporting having familiarity with school's evacuation plan



- The percentage of people who were not familiar or not very familiar has fluctuated over time, but is still low.

Figure 7

% of population reporting having a lack of familiarity with school's evacuation plan over time. The dotted line depicts the linear trend over time. The solid line depicts observed data collected in previous years.



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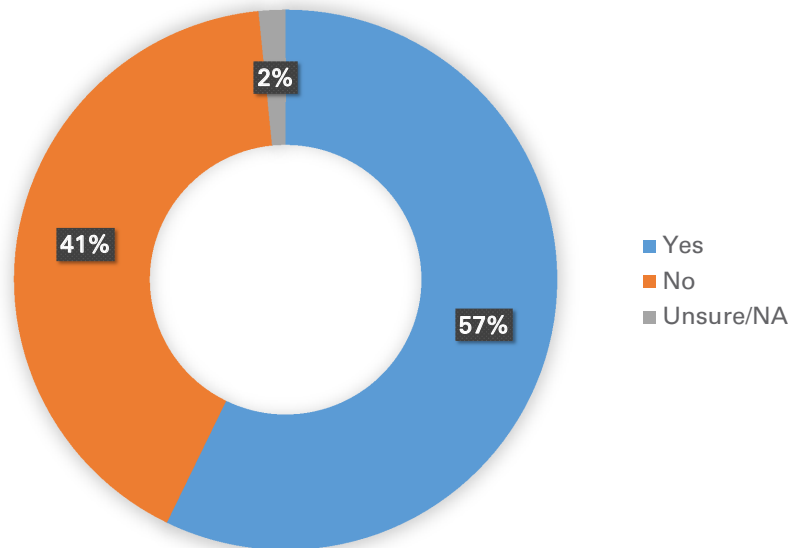
# household PREPAREDNESS

Do you know where your child or children would be evacuated to if their school had to evacuate? (Answered by survey participants with children in school or daycare)

- Among households reporting children in school or daycare (n=365), over 40% of the participants did not know where their child or children would be evacuated to if their school had to evacuate.

Figure 8

% of population reporting knowledge of school's evacuation destination location



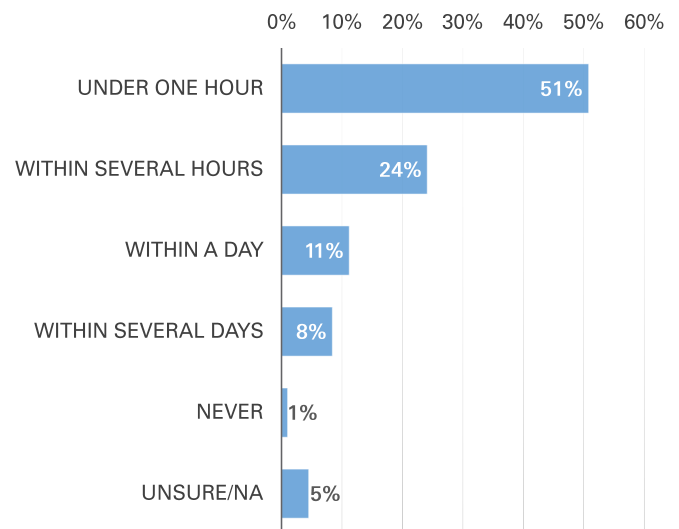
# response EXPECTATIONS

In the event of a major disaster in your community, such as a terrorist attack or a catastrophic natural disaster, how long do you believe it will take first responders, such as fire, police, paramedics, or others such as the National Guard to arrive and assist you if needed?

- Over half of all people believe that in the event of a major emergency, help will arrive in under an hour.

Figure 9

% of population reporting the timing of emergency response

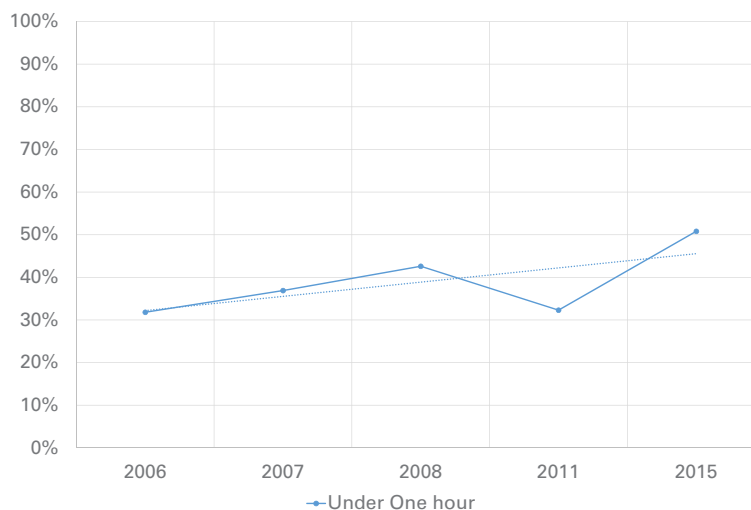


- The percentage of people who believe help will arrive in less than one hour has increased by 18.5% since 2011.

Figure 10

% of population reporting confidence in immediate emergency response over time

The dotted line depicts the linear trend over time. The solid line depicts observed data collected in previous years.



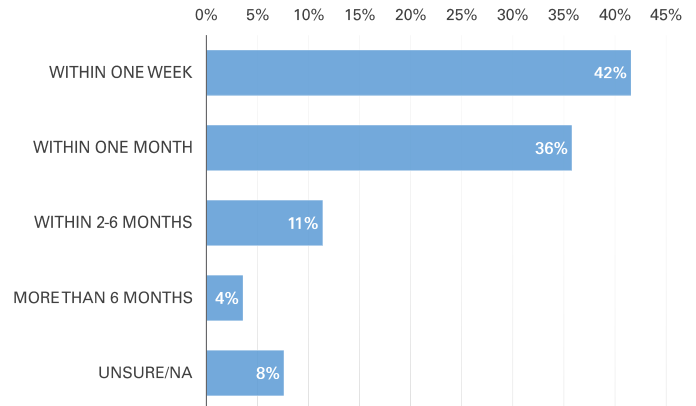
# response EXPECTATIONS

In the event of a major disaster in your community, how long would you expect before schools and daycares reopened and resumed normal schedules?

- Most people expect that school will resume in less than a month, with 42% expecting that schools will resume within a week.

Figure 11

% of population reporting expectations about the timing of resuming school after a disaster

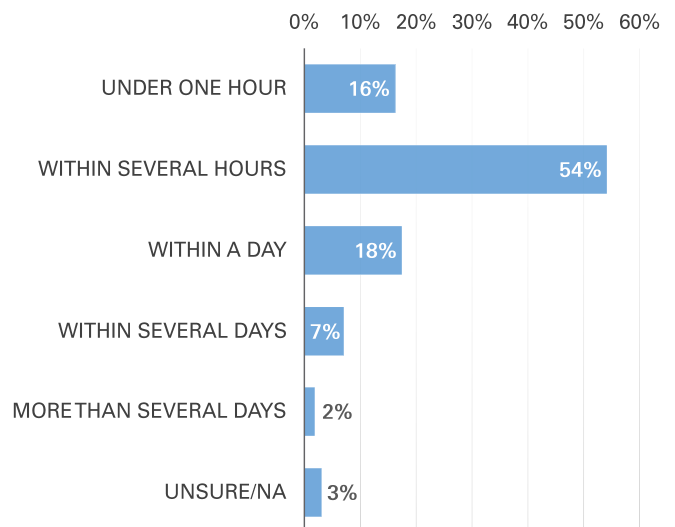


In the event of a major disaster in your community, how long would you expect it to take schools or other child-serving organizations in your community, such as daycares, to reunite children with their parents?

- Over half of the population believes that schools and other child-serving organizations in their community will be able to reunite children with their parents within several hours.

Figure 12

% of population reporting expectations about the timing of being reunited with children after a disaster



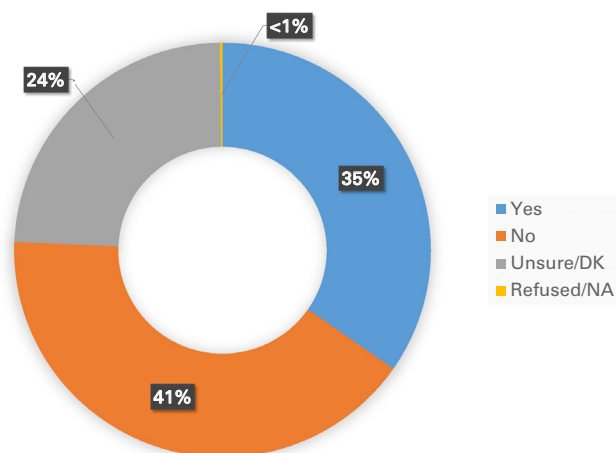
# perceived VULNERABILITIES

In the event of a major disaster where there was no warning such as a terrorist attack or earthquake, do you think your community has an adequate emergency response plan currently in place or not?

- Only 34.7% think that their community has an adequate emergency response plan currently in place in the event of a major disaster in which there was no warning, an almost 10% decrease since 2011.
- In addition, 24.3% were not sure if their community had such a plan in place or not, the highest percentage reported since 2007.

Figure 13

% of population's reported perception of community's adequate emergency response plan

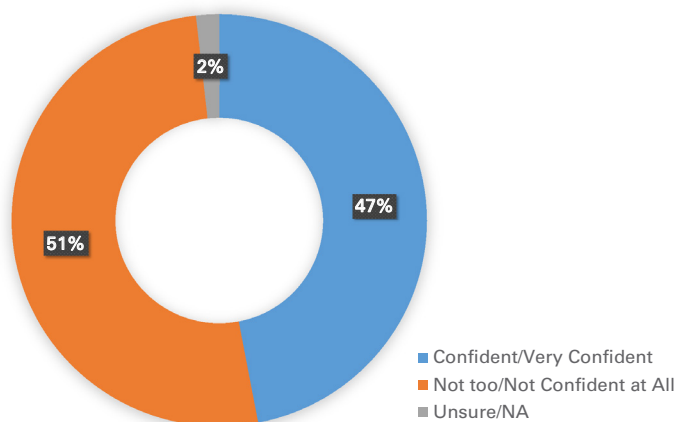


Overall, how confident are you in the federal government's ability to meet the unique needs of children in disasters?

- When asked how confident they were in the federal government's ability to meet the unique needs of children in disasters, 51% of respondents were not confident in the government's ability to do so, of which nearly 15% were not confident at all.

Figure 14

% of population reporting confidence in the government's ability to serve children's needs in disasters



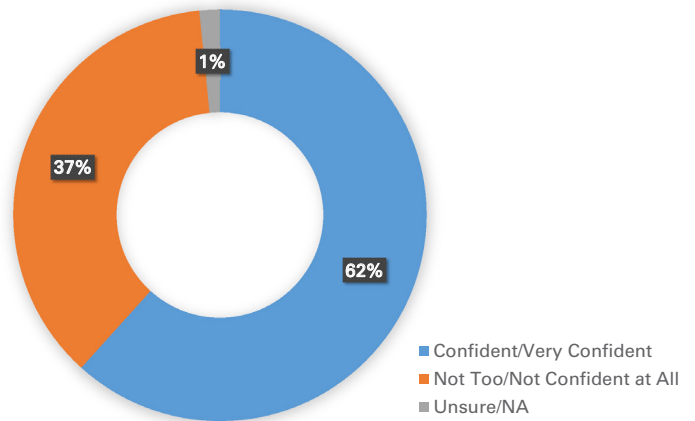
# perceived VULNERABILITIES

## Overall, how confident are you in your community's ability to meet the unique needs of children in disasters?

- When asked how confident they were in their community's ability to meet the unique needs of children in disasters, 37% were not confident, of which 8.5% were not confident at all.

Figure 15

% of population reporting confidence in the community's ability to serve children's needs in disasters

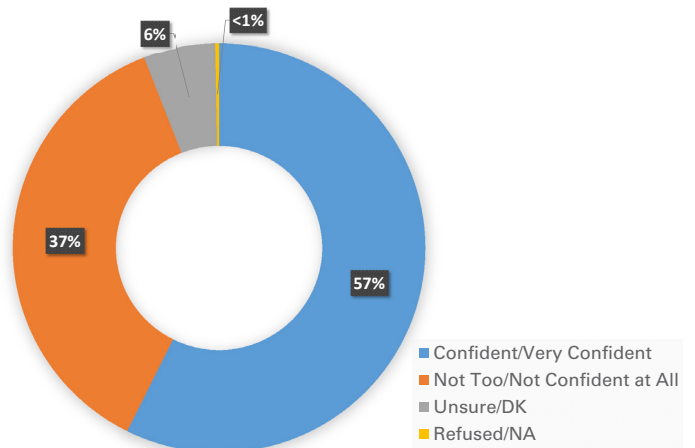


## Overall, how confident are you that your community's schools and other child-serving institutions, such as daycares, are part of your community's disaster plan?

- Although the majority of the respondents (57%) expressed some level of confidence that their community's schools and other child-serving institutions, such as schools and daycares, were included as part of their community's disaster plan, about 37% were not too confident, or not confident at all.

Figure 16

% of population reporting confidence about inclusion of schools and other child-serving institutions in community's disaster plan





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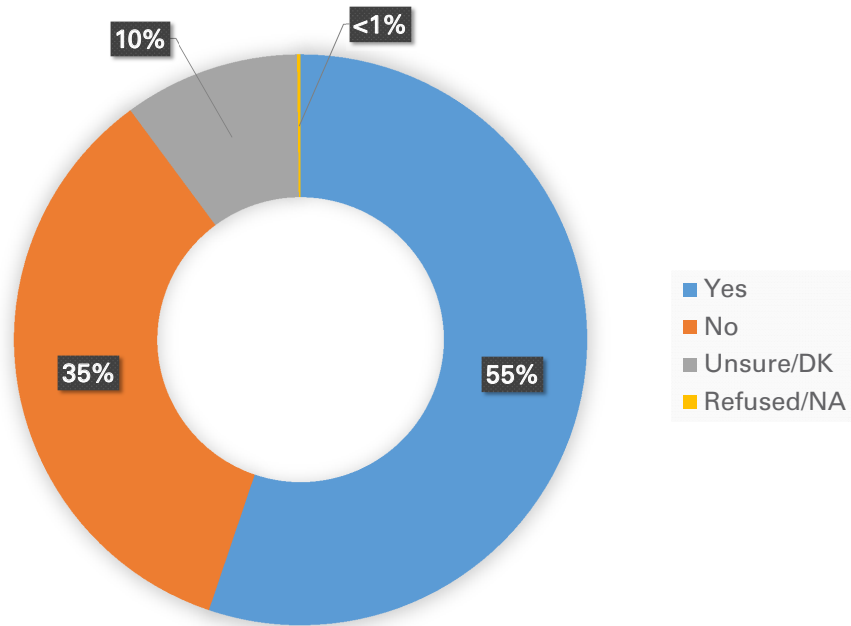
# perceived VULNERABILITIES

Do you think that the schools in your community were built to hold up in a major disaster?

- 35% of the population believes that schools in their community were not built to hold up in a major disaster.

Figure 17

% of population reporting doubts in school infrastructure



# conclusions & RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite ongoing preparedness activities at all levels, preparedness at the household level over time remains low. Awareness among parents of emergency plans at organizations that serve children is also insufficient. While individuals have a higher level of trust in “communities” (62%) versus “government” (47%) to meet the needs of their children in disasters, these levels of confidence are still alarmingly low. Interestingly, while there are low levels of trust in the ability of government and communities to respond, the expectations for a rapid response has increased over time (51% believe that help will arrive in under an hour compared to 32% in 2011). There remains much work to be done to ensure that children and families experience the benefit of preparedness programs at the household level, and that these activities inspire confidence in preparedness systems and individual action to prepare their households for disaster. Specifically, child-serving institutions, families, and emergency managers should address these issues together, in order to reflect the views of all the stakeholders.

It is important to note that these data reflect public perceptions and opinions on disaster preparedness, and that these perceptions may not reflect the actual level of disaster planning and preparedness for children being carried out nationally and among communities. Members of the preparedness policy and practice communities should examine these findings to consider ways to more effectively communicate with individuals and households in their community and to integrate child-serving organizations into preparedness programs. Additionally, insights gained from this study may help policymakers to better understand the perspectives of the public and how these sentiments correspond with their own actions to prepare and respond to the needs of children in a disaster. Specific recommendations include:

- Policymakers should review current strategies and approaches to community engagement to find ways to better integrate parents and families into preparedness programs.
- Emergency planners should identify ways to enhance the participation of child-serving organizations and the families that they serve in disaster planning.
- First responders should work with their communities to ensure that either they are prepared to meet the response expectations of their community in a disaster, or to educate community members on the factors that will impact the timeline for response if expectations are not realistic.
- Child-serving organizations, such as school and daycares, should ensure they have robust disaster and evacuation plans that include parents and the surrounding community.
- Individuals and households should invest more into ensuring their preparedness in a disaster, as well as engaging in the preparedness planning for the organizations that provide services to their children, such as schools and daycares.



