

Dealing with Disaster

What does it feel like to live through a disaster? What challenges might you encounter, and how can you overcome them? How can you help yourself, your family, and your community survive and recover?

In this module, you'll hear real-world disaster stories and write an imaginary scenario to think about how individuals and communities handle unforeseen challenges, learn from their experiences, and build resilience.

Step 1: Survivor Stories

Think about what it's like to experience a disaster.

1. Watch the video titled "[Dealing with Disaster.](#)"
2. Work on your own to explore the following disaster stories. For each one, write down one thing you found surprising or would not have thought about before seeing the story, and one key lesson you think the story demonstrates about disasters.

- a. [Preparedness Now: The Great California Shake Out](#)

What surprised me:

Key lesson:

- b. [It Started Like Any Other Day](#)

What surprised me:

Key lesson:

Extreme Event Webquest

Dealing with Disaster

c. Survivor Tales Comic Books (choose one)

- [Aftershocks](#): Read the experience of an American teenager during an earthquake in Japan.
- [In Deep Water](#): Hear how a farming family survived severe flooding with the help of others.
- [Eye Over Houston](#): See how a community pulled together during weeks without power or water in the aftermath of a major hurricane.

What surprised me:

Key lesson:

Additional Resources (optional):

[100 Days – The Mercy Hospital Flood Recovery Short Film](#): A video describing a community's response to record flooding in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

[A Vietnamese Community Weathers Serial Disasters in the Gulf](#): Read how a large Vietnamese community along the U.S. Gulf Coast has worked together to respond effectively to multiple disasters. (Additional resource: [Video: New Orleans Viet Community](#))

[Case Study: Cedar Falls, Iowa](#): How a flood-prone city took steps to bolster its resilience to flooding.

3. Think about a disaster that you have personally experienced, one that happened in your state, or one that you closely followed in the news. Briefly describe the disaster, what happened after the disaster, and how you felt about it.

a. What happened during the disaster:

b. What happened after the disaster:

c. How the disaster affected me/how I felt about it:

4. Report back to your team to share and compare your answers:
 - a. Compare the key lessons each team member identified in the disaster stories. Which of these lessons would apply across different types of disasters, and which of them are specific to the type of disaster described in the story?
 - b. Share your personal disaster stories. How is each person’s experience similar or different?

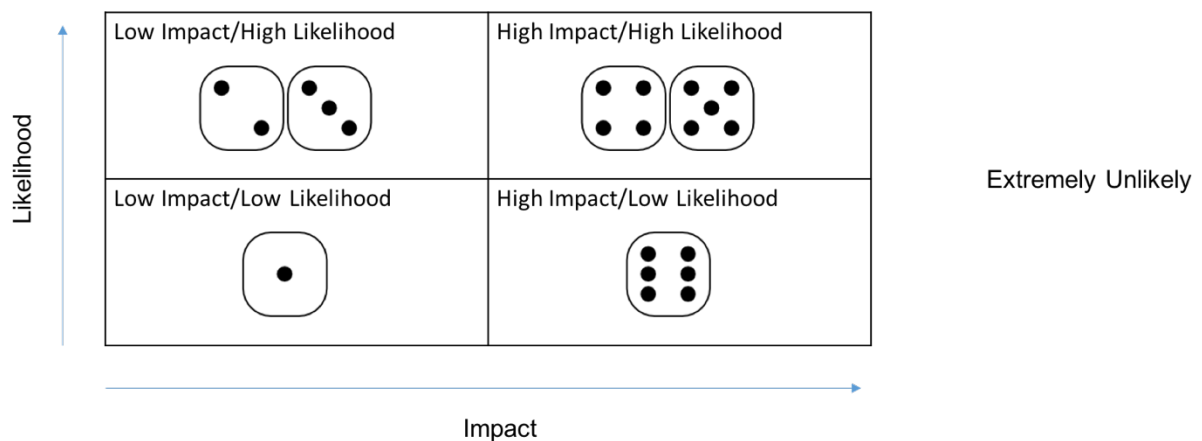
Step 2: Disaster Strikes!

In this step you will envision a disaster scenario in the city that has been assigned to your team. Use your imagination to create a storyline that shows how this disaster unfolds and how it affects the city.

1. Using the matrix you created in the “Know Your Risks” module, randomly determine which disaster type will befall your city. Here’s how:

First, roll a die and match the result to the chart below. *Example: If you rolled a three, then the disaster that befalls your city is the one located in the Low Impact/High Likelihood quadrant of your matrix.*

If there is more than one disaster type in the quadrant you rolled, flip a coin to determine which disaster type is selected. If there are no disaster types in the quadrant you rolled, roll again.



Which type of disaster befalls your city? _____

2. Recall what you know about this disaster type by reviewing the basic information you collected in the “Know Your Risks” module. Then, think about what else you have learned about this disaster type based on videos or other resources you have reviewed in this module or previous modules.
3. Follow the prompts below to create a storyline with your team. Use your imagination to fill in the details.

HOW IT ALL STARTS

What time of year is it?

Describe what’s going on around the city in the days before the disaster strikes. (For example, “Thousands of people just arrived for a big convention downtown,” or “It’s Labor Day weekend and many people are camping by the lake.”)

What are the earliest signs that disaster is looming, and when do city officials first become aware of the problem?

How do residents learn about the disaster? How much advance warning do they have?

AS THE DISASTER UNFOLDS

What immediate health risks do people face?

What are the risks to buildings and property?

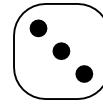
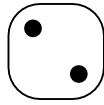
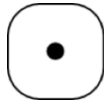
Do residents need to evacuate?

What are the most vulnerable groups of people, and how are they affected?

How do people receive information and communicate with each other?

FACING UNEXPECTED CHALLENGES

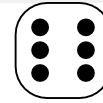
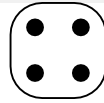
Roll a die to add one of these unexpected challenges into your storyline.



Power is out across most of the city

The hospital is overwhelmed with patients

Multiple roads are impassable



The emergency shelter is filled beyond its capacity

Communications infrastructure is damaged, and cell phones aren't working

A major pipe has burst, cutting off the water supply for many residents

How did the disaster cause or contribute to this unexpected challenge?

How does it affect residents' health, safety, or property?

How does it affect disaster response efforts?

DEALING WITH THE AFTERMATH

For how many days does the disaster itself and/or the unexpected challenge pose an immediate risk?

What does the city look like after 1 week?

- Are schools and businesses operating normally, or are some of them closed? How does this affect students, employees, and residents in general?
- Are there people whose homes have been destroyed? Where are they living now?

What does the city look like after 1 month?

- What are the lingering signs or effects of the disaster?
- What activities are underway to clean up or rebuild the city?

- How are people getting the help they need to return to normal life?

What does the city look like after 1 year?

- Are there still lingering signs or effects of the disaster? (For example, businesses that never re-opened, families who left town and never returned, or psychological impacts for residents who lived through the disaster.)
 - Have residents or the city as a whole taken steps to be better prepared for the next disaster?
4. Use your imagination to incorporate your disaster storyline into the map you sketched in the “Know Your Risks” module.

Identify the area(s) that were hardest hit by the natural disaster itself. *Example: Low-lying areas near a river are generally prone to flooding. If your city experienced a flood, color these areas blue on your map.*

Identify the area(s) most affected by unexpected challenges during the disaster. *Example: Mark roads or bridges that became impassable.*

Think about how different areas of the city might be affected in different ways, both during the disaster and in the long-term recovery period. List or draw these effects on your map. *Example: If a bridge became impassable, perhaps some people were able to evacuate, while others were stuck on the other side.*

Step 3: How Do YOU Fit into the Story?

Consider your city's disaster scenario from the perspective of your character.

1. Watch "Risk and Feelings," parts 1-3:
[Risk and Feelings, Part 1: What have feelings got to do with risk?](#)
[Risk and Feelings, Part 2: Fear of the unknown](#)
[Risk and Feelings, Part 3: Dread!](#)
2. Review the character sketch and description you created in Step 1 of the "Know Your Risks" module. Then think about the disaster that befalls your city in the story you created in Step 2 of this module. From the viewpoint of your character, write down how you felt about the risk of this particular type of disaster before it happened in your city. How much did you know about it, and how much did this risk scare you?
3. Imagine where your character was when they first heard about the disaster, what they did in response, and how they made it through.
 - a. In what ways did you need help? Where did you get it from?
 - b. In what ways did you provide help to others?
 - c. How were you feeling during and after the disaster?
4. Share your character's story and experience with the rest of your team. How are different people's experiences similar or different?

Step 4: Resources into Action

Was your city prepared for this disaster? Work with your team to see what resources your city has to make it through this crisis—and what’s missing.

1. Review the collection of 15 resources you selected in Step 5 of the “Let’s Get Ready” module.
2. Working as a team, identify which of these resources would be helpful for dealing with your disaster scenario. Then tape the resource cards (or write the resource names) near the parts of the story where they are most relevant, and write down a few notes about how the resource fits into the story.
3. Identify gaps. Are there problems in your city that are not fully addressed by the resilience resources you have available?

Step 5: Getting Help

Get creative and explore ways for your city to get the help it needs.

1. Working individually, imagine one superpower for your character that would have helped to reduce the disaster’s impact or help with the city’s response or recovery. Your superpower can affect anything other than the weather itself.
 - a. Write down what your superpower is and how it would have helped the city:
 - b. Share your superpower with your team. Then draw a sketch of each character’s superpower in action and add it to your city map.
 - c. For each character’s superpower, think of at least one real-world resource or action that could help to address some of the same needs in a world without superpowers. Write these down next to the superpower sketches. *Example: If your superpower was to create a force field that holds back floodwaters, a real-world version could be a levee or floodgate.*

