



Guest Columnist

A day in the life of a local CERT Family

By JENNIFER STEWART-TAI

One day, my husband and I got this crazy idea. What if we had a drill with our kids to test them and see how much they know? Not every family gets excited over things like this, but it's what we do. When we go camping, we like to experiment with shelter and fire. We give our kids survival problems to solve. They each have their own Go Bag filled with essentials, even the youngest.

Keith and I were married two years ago. Just prior to that, we completed our CERT Training with West Orange County CERT. As a blended family, there are six of us; Lauren 15, Colby 14, Rachel 13, and Cooper 9. Lauren is in a high school medical program and Colby is in Boy Scouts. Between the two of them, they have quite a bit of training.

So we thought, what would happen if we had a family drill? Keith and I began to come up with a scenario. It would be an earthquake at dusk. And we would be spectators. The kids would be alone. Keith and I facilitated, leading the drill, coaching, and taking notes.

We gathered all four kids in the living room and described the situation to them. The teenagers were reluctant at first, but they eventually got into their roles. We started at the beginning describing the scene to them. "Keith and I aren't home. There's been a large earthquake, it's almost dark. What do you do first?" It took a minute for this to sink in. We had them look at their feet. In So Cal it's not uncommon to be bare-foot or in flip-flops. "Shoes and Go Bags," they shouted. And they were off.

Colby was assigned to shut off the gas if necessary, and Rachel and Lauren were sent to find lights. As dinnertime approached they fired up

the camping stove and contemplated dinner options.

Mid-way through the drill, we changed the scenario. "Cooper has a broken leg. What do you do?" This is where we saw our teenagers jump in to action and try to be in control. They were arguing about the correct acronym for assessing someone's physical state. It's because of situations like this, that professionals constantly train. We paused the drill and discussed what was happening. It didn't matter who was right, getting their brother taken care of was the priority.

As parents, identifying this power struggle was a key lesson we learned about our family. In a real emergency, Keith or I may not have been there to keep egos in check and re-focus their efforts. Simply making them aware of this will hopefully eliminate this power struggle in case of a real disaster. After getting back on track, they were sharing with each other different ways to make splints and gurneys out of household items.

During our debriefing, we identified weak spots in our plan. We learned that we didn't have enough water and we wanted to invest in more solar lighting options. We didn't want to rely on candles, which can increase the risk of fire or accidents.

We also discussed our family plan. Since we are blended and have the potential to be in various cities at any given time, sharing contact information is a priority. This is one of the most important conversations your family should be having. Where will everyone be when something happens and how will you reunite? And what if you can't reunite immediately? How will you plan for that?

Since our family drill, we've purchased a supply of Blue Can Water that has a 50-year shelf life, invested in Luci solar lights, and bought

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more batteries stored exclusively for emergencies. We also have gotten our dog Lola outfitted with a pet Go Bag. Lauren has attended Teen CERT and Cooper has taken an active interest in HAMM Radio.

Step-by-Step Plan for an Earthquake Drill

1. Choose a time of day to have a drill.
2. Choose the type of disaster

3. Set the scenario
4. Move into action and review the basics
5. Basic first aid overview
6. Debrief and review your family's plan

7. Use your notes from the drill to improve your supplies and gear

Seal Beach resident Jennifer Stewart-Tai and Keith Stewart own City Girl Prepper, an emergency preparedness company committed to getting the community prepared. All the backpacks and gear are designed for women and their families.