



An Extended Guide · No. 1833

Your Family Communication Plan

So no one's left wondering

Tech Made Simple — Service Made Personal

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! Read this first — the real outage dangers are quiet ones

When the power goes out, most of the real danger doesn't come from the dark — it comes from how we try to get by without it. Every year people are harmed by carbon monoxide from a generator, grill, or camp stove brought indoors or into a garage, and by fires from candles and unvented heaters. So three rules run through this whole guide. First, never burn anything indoors that is meant for outdoors — no generator, grill, charcoal, or camp stove in the house, garage, or on a porch, not even with a window open. Second, reach for a flashlight or a battery lantern instead of a candle. Third, keep working smoke and carbon-monoxide alarms on every level, with battery backup, and never ignore one. If an alarm sounds, or anyone feels dizzy, sick, or sleepy, get everyone to fresh air first and call 911. Part of staying safe is staying reachable — so everyone knows others are okay and help can find you. This guide makes sure your family can connect when it counts.

Let's make a family communication plan

A storm has a way of scattering a family — one at work, one at home, one at the store — right when phones and networks get overwhelmed. A simple plan made ahead of time keeps everyone connected.

I'm Bill, and this is one of those plans that costs nothing and matters enormously. It answers the questions that cause the most worry in a storm: Is everyone okay? How do we reach each other? Where do we meet if we can't get home?

We'll set up an out-of-town contact, make simple cards everyone carries, agree on how and where you'll connect, and practice it once. Then, when a storm hits, nobody's left wondering.

★ I'll help you set it up

If you'd like a hand making a family plan and setting up the phones to match, that's just what I do. Call or text me at (330) 200-8042.

Your communication plan, on one page

The essentials, if you remember nothing else.

- ☐ Pick one out-of-town contact everyone checks in with.
- ☐ Make a contact card for each person to carry.
- ☐ Agree to text first — texts get through when calls won't.
- ☐ Choose a meeting place near home and one outside the neighborhood.
- ☐ Have a plan for the kids and who picks them up.
- ☐ Keep phones charged and conserve battery in an outage.
- ☐ Keep a backup: a corded phone, a note on the door.
- ☐ Practice the plan once so everyone knows it.

✓ One out-of-town contact ties it together

A single relative or friend far from the storm, whom everyone checks in with, becomes the hub that lets scattered family find each other.

Why a communication plan matters

The worst part of a storm is often not knowing whether loved ones are safe.

When a storm hits, family members are rarely all in one place, and cell networks get jammed with everyone calling at once. Without a plan, people burn through their batteries trying to reach each other and grow frantic when they can't. With a plan, everyone knows exactly what to do and where to turn.

A communication plan doesn't require any gadgets — just a few decisions made in advance and written down. It's some of the most valuable preparation there is, and it's completely free.

✓ **Decide it now, not in the storm**

The time to figure out how you'll reach each other is a calm afternoon, not the middle of a storm with the phones jammed. Make the decisions once.

Pick an out-of-town contact

This is the cornerstone of the whole plan.

Choose one relative or friend who lives far enough away to be outside your storm, and make them the family's check-in point. When local lines are jammed, a call or text to a distant number often goes through more easily. Everyone in the family checks in with that one person, who then relays that each of you is safe.

Make sure everyone has that contact's number written down and in their phone, and that the contact knows they've been picked for this role. It turns a scattered family into a connected one through a single reliable hub.

✓ Far away is the point

A local contact may be in the same jammed network or the same outage. Someone a few states away is far more likely to be reachable and able to relay word.

Make a contact card for everyone

Since almost nobody memorizes numbers anymore, put them on paper.

Make a small card for each family member to keep in a wallet, purse, or backpack. List the out-of-town contact, key family numbers, the meeting places, and important numbers like a doctor. If a phone dies or is lost, that card lets anyone reach the family from any phone.

- The out-of-town contact's name and number.
- Parents' and close family members' numbers.
- The two meeting places.
- A doctor and any critical contacts.
- For children, a parent's name and number.

✓ A card in every wallet and backpack

Numbers live in our phones now, so when a phone dies, they're gone. A little printed card keeps the family reachable no matter what.

Agree on how you'll reach each other

A shared method means everyone's trying the same thing, not guessing.

Agree that texts come first — they use less battery and get through when calls fail — with the out-of-town contact as the relay. Decide who checks in with whom, and how often. Keep messages short to save battery and get through faster. A simple, shared routine keeps everyone calm and connected.

✓ Everyone texts the same hub

If each person texts the out-of-town contact when they're safe, that one person can tell everyone else. It's the simplest way to account for a scattered family fast.

Choose your meeting places

If you can't connect by phone, meeting places give everyone a plan to reunite.

Pick two: one right near home, like a neighbor's or a mailbox, in case you must leave the house quickly; and one outside the neighborhood, like a library, church, or relative's home, in case you can't get back to your area at all. Make sure everyone knows both, and how they'd get there.

✓ One nearby, one farther out

The near meeting place handles a house emergency; the farther one handles being unable to get home. Between them, the family always has a place to head for.

Texts over calls, and saving battery

How you communicate affects how long your phone lasts and whether messages get through.

In a storm, send texts rather than calling — they use far less power and often slip through a jammed network when calls won't. Keep phones in low-power mode, dim the screens, and check in on a schedule rather than constantly. Our device-charging guide covers keeping phones alive through a long outage.

✓ Short texts, checked on a schedule

Agreeing to short check-in texts at set times — say, morning and evening — keeps everyone informed while sparing everyone's battery.

A plan for children

Children need to know the plan too, at their own level.

Make sure kids know the out-of-town contact, carry a contact card, and understand where to go and who's authorized to pick them up. Talk with their school about its emergency plan and who it will release them to. Teach them how to call for help and how to reach a parent or the out-of-town contact. Keep it calm and simple so it reassures rather than frightens.

★ Grandkids count, too

If you help care for grandchildren, it's worth knowing the family plan and the school's. I'm glad to help you get it all straight. Call (330) 200-8042.

Two kinds of homes, two sets of needs

A communication plan helps everyone, but weaker signal and farther-flung family make it matter even more in the country.

If you live in town or the suburbs

In town, signal is usually strong and family often close, so the plan is mostly about staying organized when networks get busy.

- Strong signal means texts and check-ins usually get through.
- Family and meeting places are often nearby.
- Neighbors are close for relaying messages in person.
- Still pick an out-of-town contact — networks jam everywhere.

If you are out in the country on a well

In the country, cell signal can be spotty and family farther away, so the plan and its backups carry more weight.

- Know where you get the best signal on your property.
- An out-of-town contact is even more valuable with weak local signal.
- Meeting places may be farther, so plan the routes.
- Keep backups like a corded phone, since cell coverage can fail.

★ Let's connect your family

Town or country, I'll help you build a communication plan that fits your family and your signal. Call (330) 200-8042.

Checking on extended family and neighbors

A good plan reaches beyond the household to the people who might need a hand.

Include older relatives, family who live alone, and neighbors who might need help in your check-in plan. Agree on who calls or visits whom, especially for anyone vulnerable in heat or cold. A quick check on an elderly neighbor can make all the difference, and it's easy to build into the family plan.

✓ Assign the check-ins ahead of time

Decide in advance who checks on Grandma, who checks on the neighbor down the road. Then nobody falls through the cracks when a storm hits.

Building in everyone's needs

A plan works only if it fits the actual people it's meant to protect.

Consider anyone who needs extra thought: an older relative who isn't comfortable texting, someone with a disability, or a family member who'd need help getting to a meeting place. Adjust the plan so it works for them — a phone call instead of a text, a buddy to help them, a simpler role. The best plan leaves no one out.

★ Let's make it work for everyone

If someone in your family needs the plan adapted to their abilities, I'll help you shape it so it truly works for them. Call (330) 200-8042.

Practice the plan once

A plan everyone has walked through is one they'll actually follow.

Spend a few minutes talking through it together: who calls the out-of-town contact, where you'd meet, what the kids do. Even a relaxed run-through reveals gaps — a missing number, a meeting place someone can't reach — and makes the plan familiar so it comes naturally in a real storm.

✓ A dinner-table drill is enough

You don't need a formal drill. Walking through the plan once over dinner is plenty to lodge it in everyone's memory.

Backup ways to communicate

When cell service fails entirely, a few backups keep you connected.

- A corded landline may work when cell towers are down.
- A NOAA weather radio keeps official information flowing.
- A note on the door tells family where you've gone.
- A car radio catches local news and updates.
- A prearranged meeting place works with no technology at all.

✓ A note on the door is low-tech and reliable

If you leave home during an outage, a note saying where you've gone and when lets family find you even if phones are dead. Simple and effective.

Reuniting if you're separated

The plan's real test is bringing everyone back together.

If a storm separates you and you can't connect by phone, work the plan in order: text, then try the out-of-town contact, then head for your agreed meeting place. Stay put once you're at a meeting place so others can find you, and leave word — a note, a message with the contact — about where you are. Steady, predictable steps reunite families faster than frantic searching.

✓ Go to the plan, not on a search

If you can't reach someone, resist the urge to go looking. Head to the meeting place and check in with the contact — that's where the plan brings everyone together.

Keeping the plan current

Numbers and lives change, so give the plan a refresh now and then.

When someone gets a new phone number, moves, or changes schools or jobs, update the contact cards and the plan. Fold a quick review into your twice-a-year kit check. A plan with an old number in it can leave someone stranded, so keeping it current is worth the few minutes.

✓ Update at the clock changes

Give the communication plan and everyone's cards a quick refresh when you check your kit twice a year. New numbers get added, old ones fixed.

Who does what in your household

Sharing out a few roles means the whole plan doesn't rest on one person.

Decide ahead who checks in with the out-of-town contact, who grabs the kit and the pets, who checks on a neighbor, and who handles the kids. When more than one person knows the plan and their part, it holds up even if someone isn't home. Write the roles down with the plan.

✓ Don't let it all rest on one person

If only one person knows the whole plan, the family is stuck if they're away. Share the roles so anyone can carry it.

A communication plan costs nothing

This may be the best free preparation you can do.

Every part of a communication plan — the out-of-town contact, the cards, the meeting places, the practice — is free. The only tiny expense is a corded phone if you want a backup, which is inexpensive. The value is entirely in the decisions and the writing-down, not in any spending.

✓ Free, and worth a fortune in peace of mind

An hour spent making this plan costs nothing and buys enormous reassurance — the knowledge that your family knows exactly what to do.

Your before-a-storm communication steps

When a storm's coming, put the plan on everyone's mind.

- ❑ Remind everyone of the plan and the out-of-town contact.
- ❑ Confirm everyone has a current contact card.
- ❑ Charge all the phones and power banks.
- ❑ Agree on check-in times for during the outage.
- ❑ Make sure the kids and any caregivers know the plan.
- ❑ Check on the extended-family and neighbor check-in assignments.

✓ A quick pre-storm huddle

A two-minute reminder before a storm — who to text, where to meet — sets the whole plan fresh in everyone's mind.

Your printable family plan

Fill this in and give everyone a copy.

- ☐ Out-of-town contact: name and number chosen and shared.
- ☐ Contact cards made for every family member.
- ☐ Meeting place near home, and one outside the neighborhood.
- ☐ Agreed to text first, on a check-in schedule.
- ☐ A plan for the kids and their school.
- ☐ Check-in assignments for extended family and neighbors.
- ☐ Backup methods: corded phone, notes, meeting places.
- ☐ The plan practiced, and reviewed twice a year.

★ Want help building your plan?

I'll help you make a family communication plan, print the cards, and set up the phones to match. A first visit is a flat \$99. Call (330) 200-8042.

Common Questions

The questions I hear most about family communication.

Q: What's the most important part of a communication plan?

An out-of-town contact — one relative or friend far from the storm whom everyone checks in with. When local networks jam, a distant number is often easier to reach, so that one person becomes the hub that connects a scattered family.

Q: Why text instead of call in a storm?

Texts use far less battery and often get through when a jammed network won't complete a call. Agreeing to text first — especially the out-of-town contact — keeps everyone connected while sparing batteries.

Q: What if the kids are at school when a storm hits?

Make sure they know the out-of-town contact and carry a contact card, and talk with their school about its emergency plan and who it will release them to. Teach them how to reach a parent or the contact.

Q: What if we get separated and can't reach each other?

Work the plan in order: text, then try the out-of-town contact, then head to your agreed meeting place and stay put so others can find you. Leave word about where you are rather than going out to search.

Q: What backups do we have if cell service is down?

A corded landline may work when towers don't, a note on the door tells family where you've gone, and a prearranged meeting place works with no technology at all. A weather radio keeps official information coming.

★ Let's connect your family

A good communication plan is free and priceless. Call or text (330) 200-8042 and I'll help you set one up so no one's ever left wondering.

You don't have to do this alone

You just have to remember that a friendly, patient person is one call away.

I hope this guide made making a family communication plan feel a little less daunting and a lot more doable. Keep it in a drawer with your other home papers, come back to a page whenever you need it, and don't worry about memorizing anything.

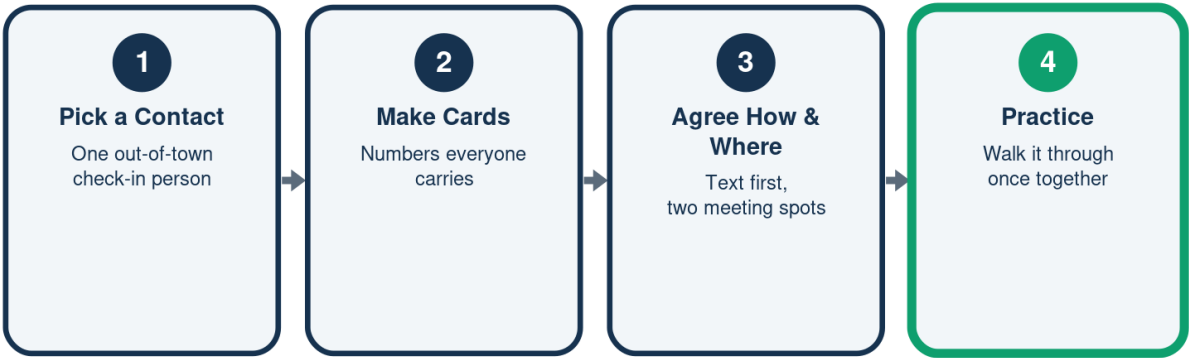
When you'd rather have a hand, that's exactly what I do. I come to your home, work at your pace, and never make you feel rushed or silly for asking. A first visit is a flat \$99, and for the parts that don't need me on-site I can often help right on your screen for \$49. Every visit comes with a 30-day, come-back-free guarantee. I don't do the licensed electrical or gas work myself — for that I'll help you line up a trustworthy local pro.

★ Bill's Home Tech — real help, close to home

Call or text me at (330) 200-8042, or visit BillsHomeTech.com. Serving Atwater and all of Portage County. 30+ years of patient, plain-English tech help — and if you're ever not 100% happy with a visit, I'll make it right or refund it. That's a promise. — Bill

Your Family Communication Plan

Four steps so no one's left wondering



A distant contact is often easier to reach than a local one.

What's on the Plan

The pieces of a plan that works

The short version	
The hub	An out-of-town contact
The cards	Numbers in every wallet
The method	Text first, on a schedule
The places	Near home and farther out
The kids	Who, where, and pickup

Every piece is free — it's decisions, not gadgets.

Can't Reach Your Family?

Work the plan in order

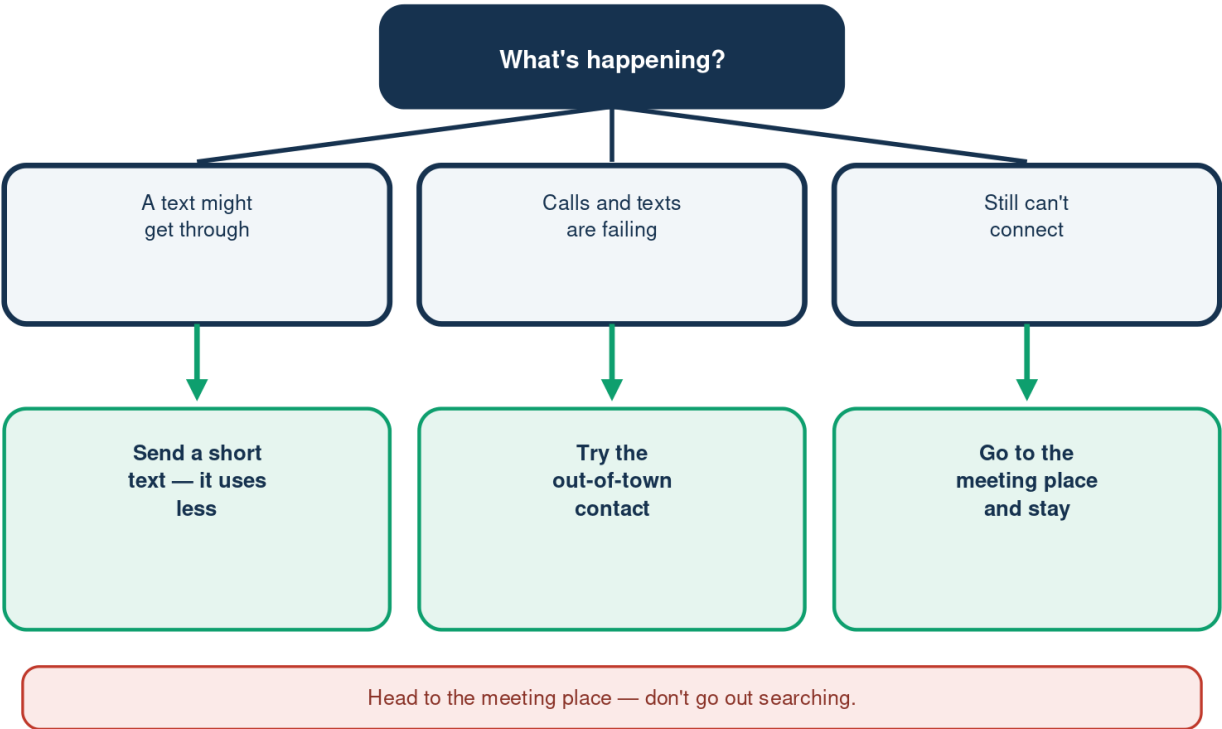


Illustration - a schematic, not to scale. Your setup may differ.

Text vs. Call in a Storm

Why texting usually wins

	Texting	Calling
Battery	Uses very little	Drains faster
Jammed network	Often gets through	Often fails
Best for	Check-ins, updates	Urgent voice contact

Text first; save calls for when you truly need a voice.



Need a Real Person?

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Bill can screen-share and fix many things remotely — a flat \$49, free for Support Plan members.



A Note From Bill

A quick note from Bill.

I write these guides to make home tech a little less frustrating, and I do my best to keep every step accurate and up to date. Still, every home, device, and setup is a bit different, so I can't promise a guide will match yours exactly or fix your particular problem. These guides are for general information only — they're not professional, legal, or financial advice, and they don't replace your device's own manual or the manufacturer's instructions. Please go slow, use your own good judgment, and use everything here at your own risk. If a step involves electrical wiring, a gas appliance, a water heater, plumbing, or climbing a ladder — or if anything just doesn't feel safe — please stop and call a licensed professional (or give me a call at 330-200-8042). Bill's Home Tech and Bill Davis can't be responsible for any damage, data loss, or injury that comes from using these guides. Thanks for reading, and stay safe out there.

— *Bill*



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