

6. What is an ideal meeting place?

Find a place to go when you're safely out

When there's an emergency, where will your family meet?

Knowing when and how to get out of a home when the alarm sounds is important, but once you're out, where should everyone meet? Having a safe meeting place means you'll quickly be able to tell if any members of your household are missing and if you need to alert firefighters that there may still be someone inside.

Identifying a safe meeting place should be part of your household emergency plan. Consider the following points when deciding on a safe, effective place for everyone in your home to gather in case you have to evacuate.

Is it far enough away to be safe?

Remember that when you're leaving a building because of a fire, smoke or carbon monoxide (CO) alarm, you're leaving it because the building is potentially no longer safe to be in. Make sure your meeting place isn't immediately next to the building such as on the front steps or the back deck. Keep a safe distance while you wait for emergency responders to arrive.

Is it easily accessible for all members of your household?

A meeting place should be accessible to everyone in your home with different mobility needs, including children to elderly parents. There shouldn't be any tripping hazards or other barriers to the spot as anyone who has left a building in a hurry may be distracted by the scene they just left. The meeting place should also be well lit so that it is clearly visible at night and out of the way enough that there is no risk of injury when emergency responders drive to the scene. Also ensure that it's easily accessible from both of your ways out of the home, no matter which route you use.

Can you easily describe the meeting place to a babysitter or guest?

As part of your emergency plan, remember that there may be times when you're not home and the nanny or babysitter will be responsible for evacuation. In addition to your family, you'll need to describe your meeting place to any caregivers, so make sure it's something that can be easily identified at a glance, in daytime or nighttime. A big tree, a mailbox in front of the neighbour's house, or something else distinctive. Think in terms of landmarks that you'd use to describe your or your neighbour's property to someone who was looking for directions.

Does it work in winter?

During much of the year, the big elm tree in your front yard may be a great place to meet – easy to recognize and describe and far enough away that you should be safe until the fire department arrives. But how are you going to reach it in winter? If there's a giant windrow of snow on the street and a foot of snow on the lawn all around it, your meeting place becomes impractical. Remember that fires happen in all seasons, and that your meeting place should be accessible throughout the year.