

Guide to Developing a Personal Emergency Action Plan for Study Abroad Participants

Special thanks to [SAFETI Consortium](#) and the [Center for Global Education](#) and their [Study Abroad Safety Handbook](#) for the original development of this document.

This guide is designed to help you better cope during a crisis. Being able to deal well with a crisis situation includes understanding your emotions, keeping yourself as safe as possible, and communicating with your emergency contacts by creating and using your personal Emergency Action Plan (EAP).

While most students experience a safe and healthy time abroad, some are forced to deal with minor emergencies. Some of the more common minor emergencies that students may face abroad include: pick-pocketing, petty theft, illness, injury, and the consequences of alcohol or drug use.

The majority of students can protect themselves from such minor emergencies in much the same ways they protect themselves from similar situations at home. However, what students consider a minor emergency here at home can turn into a more difficult to handle situation abroad. Small emergencies abroad can seem like larger ones due to language and communication barriers, and a lack of familiarity with foreign surroundings and legal structures.

In addition to minor emergencies, some students may also face larger emergencies abroad. Frequently, these major emergencies tend to be events out of a student's control. Some unpredictable, major emergencies that could occur abroad include: natural disasters like earthquakes and hurricanes, criminal assaults or acts of terrorism, and serious medical problems.

A. Things To Do Before a Crisis Occurs

1. Create an Emergency Action Plan

The first step in crisis management is being prepared before a crisis occurs. Consider adopting a personal Emergency Action Plan (EAP) for yourself. Essentially, this document describes what actions to take in the event of an emergency. Your EAP could be as simple as a list of people to call in case you are hurt, along with copies of your insurance papers, passport, and names of any medications to which you are allergic. Please see the Emergency Planning section for how to create a personal EAP, and steps to take during an emergency.

2. Why Create a EAP?

The more support networks you have during an emergency or crisis, the more likely someone will be available to help you. Also, the better prepared you are ahead of time, the better chance you have of responding effectively to a crisis abroad. Therefore, it is important to set-up support networks, and an EAP, before an emergency occurs-before you actually need assistance. Emergencies like natural disasters and political unrest are beyond a student's control, yet many students often have an invincible "that won't happen to me" attitude. We hope students change that attitude to "if that happens to me, I will be able to keep myself healthy and safe." Emergencies abroad may also result from accidents, injuries, and physical or mental health problems. Creating a EAP is a good first step towards keeping yourself healthy and safe in the event of an emergency or crisis abroad.

3. Who Needs a Copy of Your EAP?

Give copies of your EAP to your contacts abroad, and leave copies with appropriate contacts at home, which may include several family members and friends. Make sure to always keep a copy on hand for yourself as well. You should consider giving your EAP to the following contacts:

In the U.S.:

- ✓ Your primary home emergency contact (Power of Attorney)
- ✓ Family members/relatives/guardian
- ✓ Friends
- ✓ Your home campus- academic department and the ISC

Abroad:

- ✓ Your primary abroad emergency contact
- ✓ Housing coordinator abroad/home-stay family member(s)
- ✓ Friends or family abroad
- ✓ Your abroad campus department(s) which maintains emergency contact information
- ✓ Your study abroad program resident director or host family.
- ✓ Attach your EAP to your embassy or consulate registration form (if they accept it)
- ✓ Yourself

4. How to Create an EAP

Getting to You:

Ideally, try to develop detailed written directions so that someone would be able to locate you at your study abroad or travel location(s) in the event of an emergency. You may want to draw visual aids or maps in addition to writing out instructions.

Getting Yourself Out:

Then, try to develop detailed instructions for yourself, showing possible routes from your place of residence, hotel/hostel, work/internship and/or university/program abroad to a safe place. You may also want to include other places that you frequent, including shops, restaurants, subway stations, nightclubs, etc. You may want to draw visual aids or include a copy of a map in addition to writing out instructions.

Thing to Consider:

Remember, elevators may not function, and electric doors may not open in the event of an emergency; make sure to map out escape routes in which you take the stairs (or wheelchair ramps) rather than elevators. Consider carrying a small flashlight with you at all times in case the lights go out and you need to find your way through dark hallways or stairwells. Phone lines may also go down, so don't rely on calling someone to come pick you up. Have your Emergency/First Aid Kit available to take with you.

Programs and Groups:

If you are studying abroad as part of an organized program, or traveling abroad in a group tour, your program/group may have designated emergency meeting points. At these emergency meeting points, program/group leaders may assemble emergency supplies, count participants to make sure no one is missing, and give instructions for what will happen next. However, your program/group may not have such an emergency plan (if your program/group has activities or response plans that don't seem appropriate for you, it is important to communicate your concerns, and feel comfortable that the arrangements are appropriate for you). Check to see what kind of emergency plan your program/group has (if any). Even though you are with a program/group, you may have to rely on your own EAP to help you cope with a crisis. It is important to create a balance between what your program/group can do for you in an emergency, what your embassy/consulate can do, what your personal contacts can do, and what you will need to do for yourself.

On Your Own:

If you are not studying/traveling with a program or group, it becomes even more crucial for you to create a detailed EAP; you might find yourself alone and entirely responsible for your own safety, your own evacuation, and your own well-being. If you are studying/traveling independently, try to establish emergency places to go (or meeting points) and escape routes, and always have your own emergency kit fully stocked and ready. If you are traveling independently, provide an itinerary

for your trip. Check in with your emergency contacts by e-mail or phone from your various travel locations; this will help give them a general idea of where you are and where you are going. Even though you may be studying/traveling by yourself, you don't necessarily have to be alone in a time of crisis. Try to balance what your embassy/consulate can do for you in an emergency, what your contacts might be able to help you with, and what you will need to accomplish on your own.

Registration with the Embassy:

When you arrive, register with the U.S. Consulate or Embassy in the country where you will be studying (if you are not a U.S. citizen, register with the embassy/consulate of your home country). Registering with the Consulate or Embassy will make it easier for them to contact you in case of an emergency and to assist you in case you lose your passport, etc. To better enable them to assist you, it is suggested that you sign the privacy release form when you register. Ask for a briefing from the consular officer on safety issues in the country where you are studying.

Statistics to Know:

Research statistics about the frequency of natural disasters, political turmoil, terrorism, technology disruptions (like power outages) in the countries in which you will be traveling. Prior to departure or immediately upon arrival, you should identify appropriate medical facilities in case of injury abroad. It is important to know whether your travel insurance will pay in advance for care, or whether you will need to apply for reimbursement. In the case of injury, the U.S. Bureau of Consular Affairs can assist your family in sending you the necessary funds to pay for your medical care. In some instances they can help arrange for your transport and accompaniment back home, although they won't pay for this.

Create and Carry an Emergency Card

Print out the Emergency Card. Fill it in. Leave a copy with your U.S. emergency contacts, with your abroad emergency contacts, and keep a copy with you at all times.



Student Emergency Information Card	
<p>Student Name _____ Date of Birth ____/____/____ Citizenship _____</p> <hr/> <p>Study Abroad Program Name _____</p> <p>Abroad Program Emergency Contact _____ address _____ phone # _____ cell # _____ e-mail _____</p> <p>Abroad Housing Emergency Contact _____ address _____ phone # _____ cell # _____ e-mail _____</p> <p>Home (U.S.) Campus Emergency Contact _____ address _____ city _____ state _____ zip _____ phone # _____ cell # _____ e-mail _____</p>	<p>Family (U.S.) Emergency Contact</p> <p>address _____ city _____ state _____ zip _____</p> <p>phone # _____ cell # _____ e-mail _____</p> <p>Insurance Company _____ Policy # _____ 24 Hour Ph # _____ Embassy/Consulate _____ phone # _____</p> <p>address _____</p> <p>Equivalent 911 Abroad _____ phone # _____</p> <p>Nearest Hospital Abroad _____ phone # _____</p> <p>address _____</p> <p>Passport # _____ Blood Type _____ Special Medical Conditions _____</p> <p>Wishes In Event of Serious Injury/Death _____</p>

B. During and After a Crisis

1. Understanding Your Emotions:

In response to a crisis, you may experience the following range of emotions. These feelings are normal responses to a difficult situation:

- Disbelief Fear Anger
- Anxiety/Panic Difficulty Concentrating Denial
- Worry/Concern Stress Excitement
- Depression Shock Other

2. Making Yourself Feel Safer:

There are some things you can do to calm your emotions and make yourself feel safer in an emergency/crisis situation. The following list gives some tips on how to maintain your physical safety and mental health during a crisis:

- Realize your feelings are normal
- Find/make a safe environment
- Maintain a basic self-care regimen (shower, shave, get dresses, exercise, etc.)
- Avoid confrontation, both physical and verbal
- Take one step at a time
- Assess what you can and cannot control
- Ask for help
- Create a support network

3. The Phases of Crisis

The Peace Corps outlines the main phases of crisis, as well as common symptoms that may affect you during each phase.

Phase 1: The initial phase when a crisis/emergency first occurs; may include a state of alarm, mobilization, and action.

- Physical Effects—rapid heart rate, difficulty breathing, sweating, nausea, diarrhea, etc.
- Emotional/Behavioral Effects—excitement, anxiety, fear, irritability, denial, helplessness, confusion, hyper-activity, immobilization, etc.

Phase 2: The aftermath of a crisis/emergency, which can involve everything from clean-up to war, and can last anywhere from days to years.

- Physical Effects—fatigue, lack of energy, insomnia, post-traumatic stress disorder, weight gain/loss etc.
- Emotional/Behavioral Effects—depression, sadness, guilt, anger, mood swings, grief, flashbacks, poor concentration, avoidance, etc.

Phase 3: The recovery phase, when victims begin the transition back to what their regular routines were like before the crisis occurred.

- Physical Effects—return of energy, normal sleep and appetite patterns, return to a healthy weight etc.
- Emotional/Behavioral Effects—stabilization of moods, feelings of joy/pleasure, improved thinking/working, socializing, return of interest/passions/hobbies, etc.

4. Know What To Do

Knowing the answers to the questions found below can be a good first step in helping to keep yourself safer in an emergency by creating a personal EAP. If you need help drawing a map, finding escape routes or writing emergency preparedness directions/steps, consider asking yourself the following series of questions. You should really try to include answers to all of these questions in your personal EAP:

Know Where to Go

Where should you go first in an emergency, and what method of transportation will you use to get there? Be aware of all your emergency transportation options. Know the numbers for the following:

- Airport:
- Bus Station:
- Train Station:
- Metro Station:
- Rent-a-Car:
- Boat/Ferry/Port Authority:

Know Your Emergency Contact Information

In addition to your personal emergency contacts, we also recommend you look up/ask for the numbers for the following individuals and agencies nearest to your study abroad and/or travel location(s):

- City or country's 911 equivalent:
- Local Government/Visa office:
- Consulate/Embassy:
- Police:
- Fire:
- Hospital:
- Translator service:
- Lawyer:
- Red Cross:
- 24-Hour Assist/Insurance Hotline:
- Other:

Who will you call first, second, third, etc. in an emergency? Do your emergency contacts have each others' phone numbers so they can communicate and relay information about you to each other? What are some alternate ways of communicating with your emergency contacts? Who would you like those assisting you to contact in the event of your illness, injury, incarceration, kidnapping, etc...? Do all of your emergency contacts know what your wishes are in the event of your serious injury or death? Where does your nearest emergency contact live, and how fast can you get to him/her?

Back-up Plan/Special Conditions

If the situation does not permit you to follow the original emergency plan, what is the back-up plan (Plan B)? Are there any other special conditions to consider which are unique to your situation (i.e. weather conditions/hazards in your region of study/travel, a personal physical handicap, poor public transportation or phone service in your area...)?

Emergency Kit/Money

Which items do you still need to add to your emergency first aid kit before it is fully stocked and ready? Do you have emergency cash reserves, travelers' checks, credit cards, etc. on-hand, in case you can't count on banks/ATMs, or get to a bank/ATM? Using the emergency supplies and reserve money you have set aside, for how many days would you be able to sustain yourself, and what would you use each day?

Documents that should be attached to your EAP:

Copies of Passport and Visa, Emergency Assistance Hotline Information, Insurance Card/Information, Area Maps/Safe Routes, Emergency Card, Communication Sheets Traveler's Check Receipts, Information Release and Approval for Medical Emergency Care Form (contacts & care approval), Special Medical Needs Treatment Information, Power of Attorney, Home & International Drivers Licenses

C. EMERGENCY ACTION PLAN STEPS

Print out the EAP Steps. Attach the appropriate documents and bring necessary items with you. In case of an emergency, follow the EAP Steps. Steps to help you stay calm and use your EAP more effectively in an emergency.

STEP ONE

Remain calm. Take a deep breath. You will need a clear head in order to focus on your next move.

STEP TWO

Assess the situation/Get Advice from Program Staff. Identify in what kind of emergency situation you find yourself. Contact program staff for advice. An emergency/crisis can be:

- Personal: Accident/Injury, Death, Illness, Sexual Assault, Kidnapping, Arrest, etc.
- Regional: Natural Disaster, Political Uprising, Terrorist Attack, War Outbreak, etc.

STEP THREE

Take Action. Exercise good judgement. Follow your evacuation plan/written instructions/maps you have developed as part of your EAP to help remove you from the emergency and get you to a safer location where you can get help. Remember the alternate transportation options you have available.

STEP FOUR

Get in touch. Now that you are in a safer and more stable location, update others about your situation. Using a method of communication at your disposal, get in touch with your emergency contacts so they can help you. Have them assist you in finding what you need (medical care, transport, a lawyer, etc.)

- Take care of yourself. While you are waiting for your contacts to assist you, or in case you cannot reach anyone to assist you, use your emergency kit. Take out the supplies you need to keep yourself healthy (bandages, food, jacket, radio, etc). You may need additional/continuing medical care and/or personal/psychological counseling.
- Keep Trying. If you cannot get a hold of anyone to help you (because phone lines are down, you are trapped, etc) don't give up. Try alternate methods of communication and transportation until you are able to reach someone. If you need to move to another location, let others know and leave a written description of where you are going.

STEP FIVE

Move to a more permanent location. After you have removed yourself from any immediate threat, regrouped at a safer location, and gotten in touch with your emergency contacts, you may need to move to a more permanent location for treatment/assistance. Consider your transportation options and get yourself to the appropriate location (hospital, police station, embassy/consulate, contact's home, counseling center, etc.)

STEP SIX

Stay in touch. Maintain contact and update your emergency contacts on your condition. It would be useful to have a "communication tree" whereby your emergency contacts can collaborate to help you through the emergency situation (you may need to have privacy release forms in place for this to happen).

STEP SEVEN

Evaluate and revise your EAP. After the emergency is over, and once your condition has stabilized, evaluate your EAP and use what you've learned to revise it in case of future emergencies (Please provide feedback to the USC Center for Global Education about how other students might learn from your experience).