READY AT HOME · VOLUME 9

Communications

Family plan, radios, signals

A family plan that works when phones don't
Radios to listen to, walkie-talkies and Meshtastic
Signalling for help: whistles, torches, window cards



THE SERIES

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1. The family communication plan

In a real emergency, the problem usually isn't the radio: it's that nobody knows who to call, when, or where to go. Agree this now and put a copy in every grab bag and wallet.

Our plan

Out-of-area contact (everyone checks in with them) _____

Their phone numbers _____

Check-in times (e.g. 8am & 8pm) _____

Meeting point near home _____

Meeting point in town _____

Meeting point out of area _____

Who collects the children from school _____

Who checks on (neighbour / relative) _____

Walkie-talkie channel & code _____

Meshtastic channel name _____

Where we leave notes (e.g. inside porch) _____

Wallet card

Write the key numbers on a card for each person: phones may be dead or lost and few people know numbers by heart. Children should know your mobile number and their address.

Name	Mobile	Name	Mobile

2. Ways to communicate, best to last

1. Mobile call	Works most of the time. First thing to fail in a big outage as masts lose battery and networks overload.
2. Text / SMS	Gets through when calls won't. Keep them short. Send, then switch the phone off to save battery.
3. Messaging apps	Need data. WhatsApp, Signal etc. work on any Wi-Fi you can reach.
4. Walkie-talkies (PMR446)	Licence-free, no network needed. Good for the house, farm, street, or a few km in open country.
5. Meshtastic	Off-grid text messages over several km, relayed by other nodes. Needs a phone paired by Bluetooth.
6. Radio (listen only)	A battery or wind-up FM radio: RTÉ Radio 1 and local radio carry official updates.
7. Notes & meeting points	When nothing else works: a note on the door, and agreed places and times to meet.

Figure 1. Work down the list as each option fails.

Making phones last

- Low-power mode on, brightness down, Bluetooth and location off unless needed.
- Switch the phone off between check-ins if battery is low.
- Charge from a power bank, the car (engine running, outdoors), or a power station (Vol 2).
- Save offline maps and your contacts as a screenshot.

3. Listening for information

Source	What you get	How
RTÉ Radio 1 (FM)	National news, warnings, travel	Battery, wind-up or car radio
Local radio (e.g. Midwest Radio in Mayo)	Local roads, power, water, closures, community help	FM
Met Éireann	Weather warnings	met.ie, app, radio bulletins
ESB Networks PowerCheck	Outage areas and restoration times	esbnetworks.ie or app
Uisce Éireann	Water outages and notices	water.ie, 1800 278 278
Your county council	Flooding, roads, emergency rest centres	Website, social media, local radio

4. Walkie-talkies (PMR446)

PMR446 radios are licence-free across Europe and need no network. Range is a few hundred metres in town and several km across open country or from high ground. All PMR446 radios can talk to each other on the same channel and code.

Ch	Frequency (MHz)	Ch	Frequency (MHz)
1	446.00625	9	446.10625
2	446.01875	10	446.11875
3	446.03125	11	446.13125
4	446.04375	12	446.14375
5	446.05625	13	446.15625
6	446.06875	14	446.16875
7	446.08125	15	446.18125
8	446.09375	16	446.19375

Channel plan

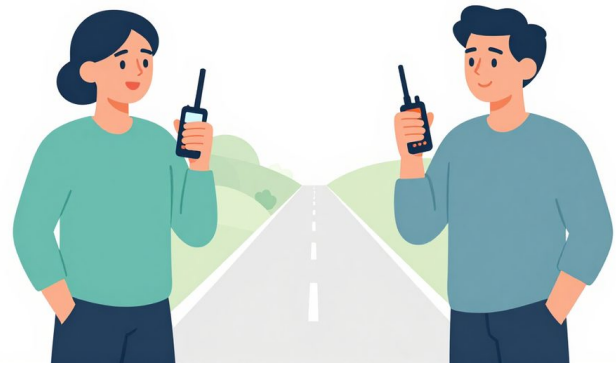
Main channel + privacy code _____

Backup channel _____

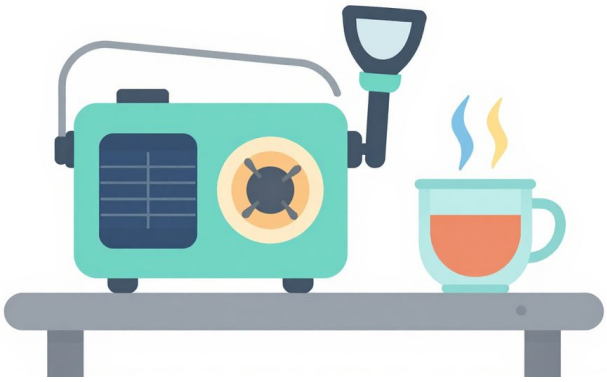
Listening schedule (e.g. first 5 minutes of each hour) _____

Call signs / names _____

Emergency word (means 'come now') _____



Licence-free PMR446 walkie-talkies: fixed aerial, 0.5 W.



A wind-up FM/DAB radio with a torch and USB charging.

Baofeng-type radios: what the rules actually say

- Radios like the Baofeng UV-5R or UV-16 are amateur (ham) radios. They can tune 433 and 446 MHz, but that doesn't make them licence-free.
- PMR446 is licence-free only for radios type-approved for it: a fixed aerial and no more than 0.5 W. A Baofeng has a removable aerial and up to 5-10 W, so transmitting on PMR446 with it isn't legal in Ireland.
- The 433 MHz band is licence-free only for very low-power (10 mW) approved devices, not handheld radios.
- Transmitting on amateur bands needs a ComReg amateur licence (an exam, then a small yearly fee). It's a rewarding hobby and local radio clubs help you get started.
- Listening is fine. Use your Baofeng to monitor PMR446, marine and amateur channels.

Two Baofengs that won't talk to each other?

Usually a settings mismatch, not range. Check both are on exactly the same frequency, with the same bandwidth (narrow/wide), the same CTCSS/DCS tone (or none), no repeater offset, and that the 'busy channel lockout' and power save are off. Short 'rubber duck' aerials and being indoors also cut range sharply.

Radios to listen to

Radio	Why	Look for
Wind-up FM/DAB radio	Works with no batteries or mains. Many charge a phone.	Hand crank + solar + USB, built-in torch, FM and DAB+
Battery FM/DAB radio	Better sound, long battery life	Runs on AA batteries you already stock
Car radio	Always there	Run the engine every so often to keep the battery up

Ireland plans to introduce mobile phone emergency alerts (cell broadcast) in 2027. Until then, local radio and RTÉ Radio 1 are the main way warnings reach people without internet.

5. Meshtastic (off-grid text messaging)

1. Buy a LoRa node for each household or person (e.g. Heltec V3, LilyGo T-Echo, RAK WisBlock).
2. Install the Meshtastic app on your phone and pair the node by Bluetooth.
3. Set the region to **EU_868** (required in Ireland).
4. Create a private channel and share it with family by QR code. Keep the public channel too, to reach neighbours.
5. Give each node a short name. Put one node high up (attic window, roof) as a relay.
6. Test it monthly. Keep nodes charged from a power bank or small solar panel.

6. Signalling for help

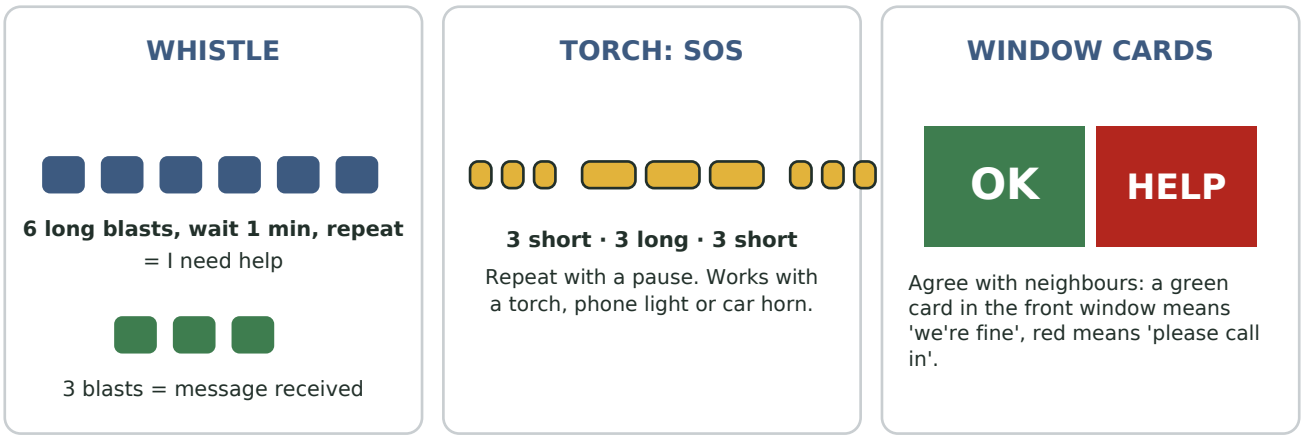


Figure 2. Signals anyone can use.

Checking on neighbours

List the people near you who might need help in a power cut or snow: older people living alone, people with medical needs, new parents. Agree how you'll check on them.

Name	Address	Phone	Needs	Who checks

Emergency numbers & the series

Service	Number	Use it for
Emergency services	**112 or 999**	Ambulance, Garda, fire, coast guard. Works from any phone, any network.
ESB Networks	1800 372 999	Power cuts, fallen or damaged lines (24/7)
Gas Networks Ireland	1800 20 50 50	Smell of gas (24/7). Call from outside the house.
Uisce Éireann (Irish Water)	1800 278 278	Water outages, burst mains, boil-water notices
HSELive	1800 700 700	Health service information
Public Poisons Line	01 809 2166	Advice if someone has swallowed or touched something harmful (8am-10pm daily)
Samaritans	116 123	Anyone struggling to cope (24/7)
Text About It	Text HELLO to 50808	Free text support (24/7)
Childline	1800 66 66 66	Children and young people up to 18 (24/7)
Your county council	_____	Roads, flooding, local emergency centres
Met Éireann	met.ie / Met Éireann app	Weather warnings

Numbers checked November 2026. Write in your county council's number above, and your own local numbers (GP, out-of-hours doctor, pharmacy, vet, neighbours) in Volume 0.

The Ready At Home series

Vol	Title	What it covers
0	Start Here	Household plan & emergency numbers
1	Just Add Water	Home-dehydrated emergency meals
2	Power Cuts & Storms	Getting through long outages
3	Water & Sanitation	Storing, treating, toilets
4	Cooking & Warmth	Without mains power
5	First Aid	Step-by-step emergency care
6	Symptoms & Home Care	Red flags, minor illness, medicines
7	Home Systems & Repairs	Shut-offs, leaks, storm damage, floods
8	Fire Safety & Security	Alarms, escape plans, extinguishers
9	**Communications**	Family plan, radios, signals
10	Grab Bags & Kits	72-hour, car, child & pet kits
11	Pantry & Stockpile	A 30-day food store you rotate
12	Outdoor Skills	Fire, shelter, knots, navigation
13	Kids, Morale & Wellbeing	Keeping people okay
14	Offline Knowledge & Media	Libraries, maps & media without internet
15	Other Emergencies	Radiation, chemicals, heat, illness, cut off

This series gives general preparedness guidance. It is not a substitute for professional medical, electrical, gas or structural advice, or for a certified first-aid course. In an emergency, call 112 or 999 and follow the call-taker's instructions.

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