

SURVIVING TOGETHER

A Civilian Guide to Survival, Safety, and Humanity in Crisis

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- 1) Localize before distribution: replace examples, emergency numbers, and agency names with local equivalents; align with local sheltering and evacuation guidance.
- 2) Safeguarding: do not collect personal data unless necessary; protect children and survivors of violence; use trauma-informed language; avoid graphic content.
- 3) Referral pathways: include a page listing locally available services (medical, protection, shelter, mental health, domestic violence support). If services are limited, state that clearly to avoid false expectations.
- 4) Community feedback: provide a safe feedback channel. Correct misinformation quickly. Do not distribute unverified instructions.
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How to Use This Pocket Guide

Read it once before crisis. During crisis, use the checklists and 'zero-thinking rules' at the end of each chapter. Your goal is to prevent irreversible mistakes: panic movement, family separation, indoor fire/CO poisoning, unsafe water, medication interruption, and escalation.

Quick Start (If You Only Read Two Pages)

- 1) Pause for 90 seconds before major decisions if you are not in immediate life-threatening danger.
- 2) Keep the household together. Separation creates permanent risk.

- 3) Stay unless staying is clearly more dangerous, or a lawful evacuation order is issued.
- 4) Water first: secure safe drinking water; boil if unsure (pathogens), avoid if chemicals suspected.
- 5) No indoor combustion: never use charcoal or gasoline indoors; prevent carbon monoxide exposure.
- 6) Medical: stop severe bleeding, support breathing, prevent shock; do not attempt invasive procedures.
- 7) Medication: do not ration life-sustaining meds without professional guidance; protect storage and schedule.
- 8) Information discipline: act only on verified official instructions; apply a two-source rule.
- 9) Sleep: protect rest. Fatigue causes fatal mistakes.
- 10) Stay civilian and lawful: comply with curfews, checkpoints, and lawful orders; de-escalate.

CHAPTER 1 How Ordinary People Stay Alive in times of War

Survival Starts with the Mind: How Ordinary People Stay Alive in times of War

THIS CAN SAVE YOUR LIFE IF

- You feel overwhelmed, frozen, or panicked while danger is unfolding
 - You are pressured to act fast without clear information
 - You must make decisions for children, elderly, or dependents
- If you understand this chapter before crisis hits, you are far less likely to make irreversible mistakes.

PURPOSE OF THIS CHAPTER

This chapter teaches you how survival actually works for civilians.

Most people do not die because they lack strength, gear, or courage.

They die because stress breaks their thinking, leading to bad decisions at the worst possible moment.

Survival begins before water, food, or shelter.

It begins with how your brain behaves under threat.

1.1 The Hard Truth: Survival Is Not About Being Brave

Movies and social media show survival as:

- Fast reactions
 - Heroic risk-taking
 - “Doing something” at all costs
- This is wrong and dangerous.

In real crises:

- Panic kills
 - Speed without clarity kills
 - Courage without restraint kills
- Most civilians who die did not need to move, fight, or act heroically. They needed to pause, simplify, and avoid irreversible mistakes.

1.2 What Stress Does to Your Brain (And Why This Is Not Your Fault)

When danger appears, your body releases stress hormones. This causes:

- Tunnel vision (you miss obvious dangers)
- Time distortion (everything feels urgent)
- Poor memory (you forget plans you made)
- Impulsive action or freezing

This happens to everyone, including trained professionals.

Important:

This is biology, not weakness.

Survival is not about eliminating fear.

It is about slowing decisions enough to stay safe.

POINT OF NO RETURN — DO NOT IGNORE THIS

People die when they:

- Rush decisions “because it feels urgent”
 - Follow the loudest or most confident person
 - Act before verifying information
 - Split families without a reunification plan
- Once these happen, you may not get a second chance.

1.3 The First Rule of Civilian Survival

If you are not bleeding, choking, or in immediate danger, the safest action is usually to WAIT briefly and THINK.

Waiting:

- Reduces mistakes
 - Allows better information
 - Prevents panic-driven movement
- Waiting is an action, not passivity.

1.4 The 90-Second Survival Pause (Zero Skill Required)

When something suddenly happens:

1. Stop for 90 seconds
2. Take 5 slow breaths
3. Inhale 4 seconds
4. Exhale 6 seconds
5. Ask yourself:

What happens if I do nothing for 10 minutes?

If waiting does not clearly increase danger, waiting is safer.

This simple pause has saved lives in fires, evacuations, and medical emergencies.

1.5 The SAFE Decision Filter (Use This Every Time)

Before any major action, ask:

S — Safety

Does this reduce exposure to fire, collapse, crowds, or violence?

A — Authority

Is this legal and based on verified instructions?

F — Feasibility

Can *this household* actually do this, including children and elderly?

E — Exit

Can we stop or reverse this if conditions worsen?

If any answer is “no”, do not proceed.

1.6 Survival Is a Household Activity (Not an Individual One)

People die when:

- Everyone decides independently
- The most anxious person takes control
- Children are left without supervision
- No one tracks time, water, or medications

Minimum safe roles (even for 2 people):

- Decision lead (uses SAFE filter)
- Care lead (children, elderly, sick)
- Resource tracker (water, food, meds)

Roles prevent chaos.

Chaos kills.

HOW PEOPLE DIE HERE (REAL FAILURE MODES)

- Acting on rumors
- Rushing “before it’s too late”
- Letting fear override plans
- Splitting families to “cover more ground”
- Believing calm equals danger and panic equals action

These are predictable errors.

Predictable errors can be avoided.

ZERO-THINKING RULES (READ THIS UNDER STRESS)

- Do not run unless there is immediate danger
- Do not split the household
- Do not follow unofficial orders
- Do not act on social media information
- Do not rush because others are rushing

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Survival starts with thinking, not moving
- Fear changes your brain — expect it
- Waiting briefly often saves lives
- Simple decision tools beat instinct
- Households survive together

CHECKLIST (NO GEAR REQUIRED)

- SAFE filter memorized

- 90-second pause practiced
- Household roles assigned
- Agreement: “We wait unless unsafe”
- Trusted information sources identified

IF YOU ONLY DO 3 THINGS

- Pause before acting
- Keep the household together
- Use the SAFE filter

COMMON MISTAKES

- Confusing urgency with danger
- Letting panic drive movement
- Over-explaining instead of acting simply
- Ignoring children’s stress signals

VERIFICATION NOTES

This chapter aligns with established principles from:

- Emergency management
 - Disaster psychology
 - Human factors engineering
- Top uncertainties: individual stress tolerance, sleep deprivation effects, group dynamics

THIS PART FAILS IF

- No one practices pausing
- Decisions are emotional, not deliberate
- Plans exist only “in theory”

CHAPTER 2 Stay or Go

When Shelter Saves Lives and When Movement Kills

THIS CAN SAVE YOUR LIFE IF

- You are unsure whether to leave your home or stay
 - Others around you are fleeing and pressure you to move
 - Information is confusing, emotional, or contradictory
- Most civilian deaths during war happen during movement, not while staying put. This chapter teaches you when not to move.

PURPOSE OF THIS CHAPTER

This chapter helps you answer one of the most dangerous questions in a crisis:

Should we stay, or should we go?

There is no heroic answer.

There is only a safer answer for the situation you are in.

2.1 The Dangerous Myth: “Moving Is Always Safer”

Many people believe:

- “Staying is passive”
 - “Movement equals safety”
 - “If others are leaving, we should too”
- This belief kills civilians.

Movement exposes you to:

- Fire and collapsing structures
 - Checkpoints and misunderstandings
 - Crowds, panic, and stampedes
 - Separation from family members
- Staying in a known place is often far safer than moving into uncertainty.

POINT OF NO RETURN — READ CAREFULLY

Once you leave your shelter:

- You lose control over timing
 - You lose protection from walls and roofs
 - You may not be able to return
 - Children and elderly slow movement
- Leaving is often irreversible.
Do not leave unless staying is clearly more dangerous.

2.2 When Staying Is the Safer Choice (MOST CASES)

Staying is usually safer when:

- Your shelter is intact
- There is no fire, smoke, or collapse risk
- Water and basic sanitation are possible

- Authorities have not ordered evacuation

Staying allows:

- Better rest
- Better hygiene
- Better decision-making
- Family unity

Important truth:

Most people who survive war spend most of it staying, not moving.

2.3 When You MUST Leave (Non-Negotiable Triggers)

You should leave immediately if any of the following occur:

- Fire inside or spreading toward the building
- Heavy smoke you cannot escape
- Structural damage that worsens
- Chemical or industrial smoke nearby
- Direct, immediate threat to life

If staying means certain harm, movement becomes necessary.

2.4 Authority Matters: Legal Orders Save Lives

Evacuation orders are not suggestions.

If official authorities issue a clear evacuation:

- Follow it
- Do not delay to “wait and see”
- Do not improvise alternative routes

Ignoring lawful evacuation orders is a major cause of civilian injury and detention.

2.5 The SAFE Filter — Applied to Movement

Before leaving, ask:

S — Safety

Is staying more dangerous than moving?

A — Authority

Is this based on verified, lawful instruction?

F — Feasibility

Can *everyone* move safely, including children and elderly?

E — Exit

Do we have a clear destination and stop point?

If you cannot answer all four, do not move.

2.6 Movement Kills Through Fatigue and Confusion

People die during movement because:

- They underestimate distance and time
- Children become exhausted

- Elderly fall or collapse
- People split “just for a moment”
Fatigue destroys judgment.
Destroyed judgment leads to fatal decisions.

HOW PEOPLE DIE HERE (REAL FAILURE MODES)

- Leaving because others are leaving
- Leaving at night “to be unseen”
- Carrying too much and slowing down
- Changing destination mid-route
- Separating to “move faster”
These mistakes repeat across all conflicts.

ZERO-THINKING RULES (USE THESE UNDER STRESS)

- Do not leave at night unless staying will kill you
- Do not split the household
- Do not change destination once moving
- Do not chase rumors
- Do not rush because others rush

2.7 If You Decide to Stay: Make Staying Safer

Staying safely means:

- Staying indoors, away from windows
- Reducing fire risk
- Limiting movement outside
- Establishing routines
Staying is active survival, not waiting to die.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Movement is dangerous
- Staying is usually safer
- Leave only for clear, immediate threats
- Authority and verification matter
- Families survive together

CHECKLIST (NO GEAR REQUIRED)

- SAFE filter understood
- Evacuation triggers agreed
- Destination identified (if needed)
- Household agreement: “We stay unless unsafe”
- Children briefed simply

IF YOU ONLY DO 3 THINGS

- Do not move unless staying is more dangerous
- Follow verified evacuation orders

- Keep the household together

COMMON MISTAKES

- Confusing fear with danger
- Leaving “just in case”
- Night movement without necessity
- Changing plans repeatedly

VERIFICATION NOTES

This chapter aligns with:

- Civil defense evacuation guidance
 - Humanitarian civilian-protection doctrine
 - Disaster risk-reduction research
- Top uncertainties: local enforcement behavior, speed of threat escalation, shelter integrity.

THIS PART FAILS IF

- You treat movement as default
- Decisions are based on rumor
- Family members act independently

CHAPTER 3 Information Under Fire

How to Know What Is Real When Everyone Is Lying

THIS CAN SAVE YOUR LIFE IF

- You receive conflicting instructions
 - Social media is flooded with urgent messages
 - People around you panic based on “news” or rumors
- In war, bad information kills more civilians than bad weather. This chapter teaches you how to not act on lies.

PURPOSE OF THIS CHAPTER

This chapter helps you answer one critical question:

Is this information safe enough to act on?

You do not need perfect information.

You need reliable-enough information to avoid irreversible mistakes.

3.1 Why Information Becomes Dangerous in War

In conflict:

- Rumors spread faster than facts
- Fear amplifies urgency
- Social media rewards speed, not accuracy
- People repeat what *sounds* helpful

False information causes:

- Unnecessary evacuations
- Movement into danger
- Missed aid
- Family separation

POINT OF NO RETURN — INFORMATION ERRORS

People die when they:

- Act on the first message they receive
 - Trust messages that demand immediate action
 - Believe “everyone says so”
 - Share unverified instructions
- Once you act on false information, you may not be able to undo it.

3.2 The Only Information That Is Safe to Act On

Tier 1 — Safest (Act on this)

- Official emergency broadcasts
- Local authorities you can physically verify
- Recognized humanitarian organizations on-site

Tier 2 — Use with caution

- Major news organizations
- Messages confirmed by two independent sources

Tier 3 — Do NOT act on

- Social media posts
 - Voice messages forwarded by friends
 - Anonymous warnings
 - Screenshots without source
- If it cannot be verified, treat it as noise.

3.3 The Two-Source Rule (Simple and Powerful)

Before acting, confirm information with:

- Two independent sources, not repeating each other

Example:

- Radio announcement + official website
 - Authority on-site + radio
- If confirmation is impossible:
- Default to staying put unless immediate danger exists.

3.4 Urgency Is a Red Flag

Messages that say:

- “Act now or you will die”
 - “Share this immediately”
 - “Authorities are hiding this”
- Are almost always unreliable.

Real emergency instructions:

- Are repeated
- Are boring
- Are consistent
- Do not pressure emotionally

HOW PEOPLE DIE HERE (REAL FAILURE MODES)

- Leaving shelter due to a viral message
- Moving toward “safe corridors” that do not exist
- Missing aid due to fake schedules
- Being detained for following false orders

ZERO-THINKING RULES (USE THESE)

- Do not act on forwarded messages
- Do not trust screenshots
- Do not share unverified information
- Silence is safer than false certainty
- Waiting is safer than guessing

3.5 Assign an “Information Lead”

Every household needs one person **who:**

- Listens to official updates
- Applies the two-source rule
- Decides what information matters

This prevents:

- Panic
- Conflicting actions
- Information overload

3.6 Children and Information Exposure

Children:

- Absorb fear without context
- Assume worst-case scenarios
- React emotionally to adult panic

Protect them by:

- Limiting news exposure
- Giving short, honest explanations
- Avoiding graphic descriptions

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Most crisis information is wrong
- Urgency often signals deception
- Two-source verification saves lives
- Waiting is safer than guessing
- Households need an information lead

CHECKLIST (NO GEAR REQUIRED)

- Trusted info sources identified
- Two-source rule agreed
- Information lead assigned
- Household rule: “No rumor action”
- Children’s info limits set

IF YOU ONLY DO 3 THINGS

- Verify with two sources
- Ignore urgent forwarded messages
- Stay put if unsure

COMMON MISTAKES

- Acting on fear-based messages
- Sharing rumors “just in case”
- Letting multiple people decide
- Overexposing children to news

VERIFICATION NOTES

This chapter aligns with:

- Civil defense communication guidance
 - Humanitarian misinformation warnings
 - Crisis psychology research
- Top uncertainties: access to official broadcasts, deliberate information suppression, language barriers.

THIS PART FAILS IF

- Rumors override plans
- Everyone decides independently
- Social media becomes a command source