

Your body should remember evacuation procedure:

'Power to survive through tsunami' cultivated by disaster prevention education

Translated by SEEDS Asia

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◇ Run to a place as higher as possible, as early as possible

Tohoku region earthquake caused significant damage in the field of education. However, some students survived by hair because their schools had been putting a lot of effort in disaster prevention education. For example one of the schools participated in 'Bosai Koshien (League of Disaster Prevention), organized by Mainichi daily news and Hyogo prefecture, an event that awards excellent ideas of disaster prevention education and activity practiced by schools and community.

◇ Escaped as trained, 'I was not scared.' / master evacuation procedure through playing the card and creating the map/ one can make quick critical judgment

◇ Kuwagasaki elementary school, Miyako, Iwate

Kuwagasaki elementary school is located on a hilltop at the west side of Miyako bay. After the earthquake, the ground was soaked in water and became all muddy, and there are lines of cars of victims. Right next to the debris and furniture scattered around, victims are now cooking at soup kitchen.

In Miyako-shi, the city was significantly damaged by Showa Sanriku Tsunami on March 3rd, 1933. To remember the hard time of tsunami, the city has been traditionally conducting evacuation training on March 3rd every year. At Kuwagasaki elementary school, they have just had an evacuation training 8 days before the earthquake of this time, and all the students were safe. Mr. Nakamura, a vice principal at the school, looked back: 'We never really thought that tsunami would ever actually come up to this point so that we need to evacuate.'

The earthquake happened during the class. 240 students were standing in rows in the school playground. When they were about to evacuate to Miyako-shiritsu-daini middle high school located on higher ground, they heard echoing voice of a fire fighter: 'Tsunami is coming! You don't have enough time to escape to the middle high school!' It is an uphill of 1 km to Miyako-shiritsu-daini middle high school. Considering the speed of tsunami, the destination was too far for the students to complete their evacuation. At that stage, the school decided to escape to their secondary evacuation site, Kumano Shrine located back of the mountain. The evacuation process was exactly same as how they practiced just 8 days ago. Students quickly moved to the shrine. A few minutes later, tsunami with cars and debris swept through the school ground. At that time, it was in the middle of confirming the student's safety. One of the school graduates said: 'It was exactly same as how we have been practicing, so I was not scared.'

Kuwagasaki elementary school has been putting a lot of effort in disaster prevention education. They completed making 'Tsunami Bosai (disaster prevention) map' during the Period of Integrated Study last year. Together with people from the community, students created the map that shows evacuation sites in case of disaster. Also, after

school, many students played 'Tsunami Bosai Karuta', the card, which was awarded for the best prize at Bosai Koshien (League of Disaster Prevention) in 2007. One of the cards, with a letter 'ME', has its associated message as 'Mettani Okinai Tsunami Wasurezu (Don't forget the danger of tsunami though it hardly happens).' Mr.Nakamura said firmly: 'We will keep working on disaster prevention education.'

◇Utatsu middle high school, Sanriku-cho, Miyagi

In Utatsu elementary school, Sanriku, Miyagi, the principal, Mr.Abe, 58 experienced Chile earthquake and tsunami of 1960 in a town previously known as Shitsukawa (Current Minami Sanriku city). His house was swept away during the tsunami. He was appointed to a principal of the school last April. Last May, he gave a talk to students of 1st year grade about his own experience of earthquake and tsunami. He was teaching the students on how they should mentally prepare for the disaster: 'Your life is more important than anything else. Remember to evacuate, with no belongings with you.' There are many students who had to walk through roads that are next to the sea, and during the evacuation training, the school organized specific evacuation procedure and safety check in each area.

On the day of earthquake, Utatsu middle high school did not get damaged by tsunami as it was located on higher ground. During the time of earthquake, in the gymnastic area, students were preparing for their graduation ceremony that was planned on the next day. Mr.Abe was visiting another elementary school and he felt the ground shaking while he was on the car. On the way back, he took some parents on the car and was about to go back to the elementary school. The road was congested as everyone was trying to go to a higher ground. 'In this situation, nobody should be driving towards the sea', he immediately judged, and he drove on the opposite side of lane. 'To survive, I needed to take action that is beyond the law.' as he looked back the time.

When he returned to the school, he noticed students and teachers who were evacuating in the ground of Isatomae elementary school. He immediately told them to evacuate to a higher ground: 'Run up to the middle high school!' As soon as they evacuated, tsunami swallowed the first ground of the elementary school.

Mr.Abe is currently busy managing the gymnastic area where about 500 people are taking refuge and he is also busy preparing for a new school year. His house was swept away and he is staying in the gymnasium of the school. A few days after the earthquake, he told the students who were also taking refugee in gymnasium: 'Now it is your turn to share this experience of tsunami with your next generation.'

Mr. Abe visited other evacuee sites located in other regions: 'your safety is more than anything. Take the best care of yourself.' He told the students of Utatsu middle high school. To the parents, he said: 'my house was swept away. Let's bear through this hard time and work together.'

'Let's think this way: when you travel abroad and you cannot communicate, you learn the importance of language and will try to learn English. If you go to the place next time and if you can communicate, you are very happy. That is a life experience and disaster prevention education is exactly the same. It is important to know how to get to a place as high as possible, even 50 cm or 1 m higher, and as early as possible, even 10 seconds or 30 second earlier. Your own judgment will save your life. That is your 'power to survive.' Mr. Abe was convinced again.

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