



SURVIVING DISASTERS 101

MAN-MADE OR NATURAL DISASTERS

Emergency Preparedness: Tips for Preparing Individual's with Specials Needs Before an Emergency

Introduction: Why Emergency Preparedness?

How can you prepare yourself and/or your family with special needs for unpredictable disasters/emergencies?

Disaster preparedness isn't just a fancy term used by state institutions anymore – it has actually transformed into a mass movement because people are now aware that in the battle against the unpredictable power of Mother Nature, man can lose easily.

The losses incurred in the aftermath of natural or manmade disasters can easily bring a community and thousands of families to their knees.

It's true: man is capable of creating wonderful things with his mind. However, there is one thing that mankind has yet to conquer in his quest for an ideal world: **Mother Nature herself.**

Why should anyone care about preparing for a disaster?

When Mother Nature decides that it's time for a powerful earthquake in one city and a hurricane the size of a football field in another, all we can do to survive is to prepare for worst case scenarios so that we will have sufficient knowledge and resources to withstand unpredictable catastrophes, should they come one day.

Disaster preparedness should never be based on fear or anxiety, but rather, on the logical premise that if you know what to expect during a disaster, and you have the essential resources needed to survive it, there's a very good chance that it will not cause lasting problems for you and your loved ones.

The *objectives of emergency preparedness can be summed up* below:

1. **SURVIVAL** – This is the first and most important objective of disaster preparedness. With sufficient preparation for the most common types of disasters, the risk of mortality can be greatly reduced or eliminated altogether.
2. **DAMAGE REDUCTION** – In some situations, you can perform steps to reduce the overall damage to your property and possessions. If damage to property is minimized, the recovery period after a disaster will be easier for everyone involved.
3. **FUTURE PROTECTION** – If you become aware of the potential problems that specific disasters can bring, you can start making plans to further reduce the impact of a disaster to you and your family. You can start creating short term and long term goals that will lessen the difficulties associated with a natural or manmade disaster.

Emergency preparedness involves steps to mitigate the impact of the disaster, either natural or man-made, preparation for facing the disaster, the response that must be taken in case of a disaster, and finally, the steps to recover from the losses. However, when it comes to individuals with a developmental disability, they may require additional support to fully prepare themselves for a disaster.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), developmental disabilities are a group of conditions due to an impairment in physical, learning, language, or behavior areas. These conditions begin during the developmental period, may impact day-to-day functioning, and usually last throughout a person's lifetime. For this eBook, the developmental disabilities that will be discussed are Autism spectrum disorder, Epilepsy, Cerebral Palsy, Intellectual Disability and Down's Syndrome.

Therefore, it is important to understand that preparing for an emergency is a group activity, but for individuals with disabilities, it requires a keen understanding of the situation and mental clarity to handle it.

In this eBook, we will discuss some issues and challenges that may be faced by you or your loved ones who may have a developmental disability, and how, as members of a family or a neighborhood can offer support and training in an emergency. While planning for every situation that may occur in every type of an emergency is impossible, but being as prepared as possible is important.

General guidelines for families to prepare for an emergency:

1. The first step in preparation is to find out the types of natural disasters that may occur in the area. These could be hurricanes, tornadoes or earthquakes, etc. Along with making a list of all the possible man-made threats in the area.
2. Follow up that research by finding the emergency preparedness plans designed by the community. Find out how the community will be informed of the impending disaster, or the type of signal that will be used at the onset of a disaster. What are the steps designed by the community to communicate with the people during the disaster?
3. Next, think about your daily activities and how an emergency might impact these activities. For example, think about how you'll stay safe if the power goes out. What if officials tell you to stay indoors for several days? What supplies will you need? What will you need help with?
4. Next, build a support network of people in your community to ensure further assistance is provided. A support network (sometimes called a self-help team) can help you prepare for a disaster. They can do this by helping you identify and get the resources you need to cope effectively. In addition, network members may be able to assist you after a disaster happens.

Organize a network that includes the following: home, school, workplace, volunteer site, and any other places where you or your loved ones spend a lot of time. Do not depend on only one person. Include a minimum of three people in your network for each location where you regularly spend a lot of time since people take vacations, retire, work different shifts, and are not always available.

Once your network is formed, you or your loved ones should interact with the support network prior to an emergency and constantly grow your circle.

5. Prepare a plan that makes use visual aids for training drills. Make sure that everyone fully understands what he or she is supposed to do and how to do it in case of an emergency. Plan out the escapes and evacuation strategies or ways to find the nearest shelter, depending upon the nature of the disaster.

6. Prepare a first-aid kit along with other emergency accessories such as a whistle, blankets, flashlights, and batteries. Also, pack emergency foods that do not require refrigeration and bottled water, along with a can opener (in case the food is stored in cans). Change these food items as needed to keep them fresh and neatly stored in a pack that is easy to carry.
7. Take an assessment of the bare minimum of items that are required, such as clothes and articles of personal care. What items are essential to the person with a disability? How will items be carried and managed in case of an emergency? Who else could carry essential items if needed? How much can be stored at the local shelter or a safe house?
8. Make a list of emergency contacts and store with the emergency items, within a waterproof cover. Identify the community shelter that is closest to you, or plan out a safe house. Make sure that the person with the disability is well aware of its location should the disaster strike, as this is the location where you will meet with everyone should any one of you be away from home.
9. Make sure the support team and the person with a disability are aware of the services that may be discontinued in the event of the disaster. For example, power cuts, shortage of gas and water, a disruptive or non-existent network for communication. Plan ahead on how to improvise in such cases.

Practice your emergency escape drills, at least, monthly; during both the day and nighttime, so everyone understands their role effectively. Have the people from your support teamwork with you and review the plan for any improvements, at least, quarterly or as needed.

Now, the eBook will briefly discuss a few disabilities that fall under developmental disabilities. Although a tip may be under a specific disability, all the tips may be applicable to other disabilities depending on the individual's needs.

In addition, the book includes an example of information that should be placed on an emergency contact form and items that could be included in a DIY Emergency Backpack/"Go Bag" below.

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)?

According to CDC, autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a developmental disability that can cause significant social, communication and behavioral challenges. There is often nothing about how individuals with ASD look that sets them apart from other people, but individuals with ASD may communicate, interact, behave, and learn in ways that are different from other people. The learning, thinking, and problem-solving abilities of individuals with ASD can range from gifted to severely challenged. Some individuals with ASD may need a lot of help in their daily lives; others need less.

A diagnosis of ASD now includes several conditions that used to be diagnosed separately: autistic disorder, pervasive developmental disorder not otherwise specified (PDD-NOS), and Asperger syndrome. These conditions are now all called autism spectrum disorder. For more information on [ASD click here](#)

When an emergency occurs, effective communication is a crucial step for the preparation for an emergency as well as during the emergency, so this may be a challenge for individuals with ASD. Thus, it is may be very necessary to help individuals with ASD to understand what they may be facing in case of any disaster and how they can effectively navigate through that situation.

Emergency tips for preparing individuals with ASD:

- Make sure that any trainings/practices are carried out in a calm environment. In addition, even during the disaster, attempt to maintain the same level of calmness, so that the individual with a disability doesn't pick up the negative energy or feel scared/over stimulated.

- Ensure that everyone is fully aware of the plan and understands the necessity of the plan. Some individuals do not like disruptions in their routine; therefore, it is necessary to ensure that everyone understands the need for spontaneity in any hazardous situation.
- During the emergency, as much as possible attempt to follow the plan as-is without any deviations. If there are deviations, attempt to explain this to the individual beforehand to assist with the transition.
- Some individuals with ASD may have trouble understanding verbal commands and/or communicating for themselves. Therefore, training should include as many visual aids as possible for an effective two-way communication process.
- Determine how you will communicate with emergency personnel if you are not able to do so or do not have your communication devices (augmentative communication device, word board, artificial larynx).
- Store paper, writing materials, copies of a word or letter board and pre-printed key phrases specific to anticipated emergencies in all your emergency kits, your wallet, purse, etc.
- Obtain an alternative power source (power converter, batteries) if the computer or laptop is a means of frequent communication.
- Emergency personnel and support team should be made aware of any sensitivities/sensory concerns i.e. (loud noises, bright lights, not wanting to be touched, etc.)

What is Epilepsy?

According to the CDC, epilepsy is a broad term used for a brain disorder that causes seizures. Epilepsy is a developmental disability and a neurological disorder. The control of seizures depends on the type of seizures. For more information about [Epilepsy click here](#)

Emergency tips for preparing individuals with epilepsy:

- At times, epilepsy is unpredictably triggered, but not every seizure is an emergency. It is always better to have a list of contact people, who are aware of the person's condition, on them.
- A person having a seizure may be unable to handle himself or herself, so make sure that the support team is aware of the ways to support the individual, by following the Do's and Don'ts of first aid for seizures.

When a seizure occurs, the main goal is to protect the person from injury:

- ✓ Try to prevent a fall
- ✓ Ease the person to the floor if possible
- ✓ Once on the floor, turn the person gently onto one side. This will help the person breathe
- ✓ Clear the area of furniture or other sharp objects
- ✓ Remove eyeglasses
- ✓ Loosen tight clothing, especially around the neck
- ✓ If this was not done already, turn the person on their side. If vomiting occurs, this helps make sure that the vomit is not inhaled into the lungs
- ✓ Look for a medical ID bracelet with seizure instructions

- ✓ Stay with the person until he or she recovers, or until professional medical help arrives
- ✓ Once the seizure is over, comfort the person and speak calmly about what happened

Things friends and family members should not do:

- ✓ Do not restrain (try to hold down) the person
- ✓ Do not place anything between the person's teeth during a seizure (including your fingers)
- ✓ Do not move the person unless they are in danger or near something hazardous
- ✓ Do not try to make the person stop convulsing. They have no control over the seizure and are not aware of what is happening at the time
- ✓ Do not give the person anything by mouth until the convulsions have stopped and the person is fully awake and alert
- Make sure that the person carries their medications with them.
- Identify any sensitivities and what factors may trigger their seizures. Relay this information to the support team too. Knowing what potentially may cause seizures can help the person with the disability and the support team too, to avoid them.

What is Cerebral Palsy?

According to CDC, cerebral palsy (CP) is a group of disorders that affect a person's ability to move and maintain balance and posture. CP is a developmental disability. *Cerebral* means having to do with the brain. *Palsy* means weakness or problems with using the muscles. CP is caused by abnormal brain development or damage to the developing brain that affects a person's ability to control his or her muscles.

Depending upon their condition, you or your loved ones may need specific support during an emergency. For more information about [Cerebral Palsy click here](#)

Emergency tips for preparing individuals with cerebral palsy:

- Cerebral palsy may cause stiffness of body parts, either legs or an entire side of the body. As such, you or your loved ones may require equipment or support for carrying himself or herself. In addition, in certain situations, they may even need help with food administration.
- Train the support team to administer any medication if needed.
- Depending on the impact of the individual's CP, there may be a need for expert help, so have the primary's doctor contact information available
- Utilize some form of medical alert system to be used in case of an emergency. Make sure that it is easily accessible.

What is Intellectual Disability?

According to CDC, Intellectual disability, formerly known as mental retardation, is a term used when there are limits to a person's ability to learn at an expected level and function in daily life. Intellectual disability is a developmental disability. For more information about [Intellectual Disability click here](#)

Individuals with intellectual disability might have a hard time letting others know their wants and needs, and taking care of themselves.

Emergency tips for preparing individuals with Intellectual disability:

- As appropriate, it is advisable to keep a copy of the person's details with him or her at all the time. If appropriate and necessary, discuss the individual's disability and how to interact with him or her. For example, if the individual has difficulty in speaking or understanding then write the information down along with the ways the rescuer can aid the person.
- You may need to carry out the drills quite often to assist with learning the steps. During the course of the drill, give everyone time to process the information and practice how to communicate with others as needed. Identify any areas of difficulty – are there any difficulties in understanding or being understood? Focus on how to overcome these barriers.
- You and your loved ones should contribute to creating signals and signs, about how you would like to be communicated to in an emergency or complete the emergency workbook below.
- Distribute the emergency plan to the support group.

What is Down Syndrome?

According to CDC, Down syndrome is a condition in which a person has an extra chromosome. Typically, a baby is born with 46 chromosomes. Babies with Down syndrome have an extra copy of one of these chromosomes, chromosome 21. A medical term for having an extra copy of a chromosome is 'trisomy.' Down syndrome is also referred to as Trisomy 21. This extra copy changes how the baby's body and brain develop, which can cause both mental and physical challenges for the baby.

Even though individuals with Down syndrome might act and look similar, each person has different abilities. Individuals with Down syndrome usually have an IQ (a measure of intelligence) in the mildly-to-moderately low range and are slower to speak than other children. As such, they have varying levels of delays with their cognitive process, though they are capable of learning and developing their skills. For more information on [Down Syndrome click here](#)

Emergency tips for preparing individuals with Down syndrome:

- Be patient with them and their sensitivities and train them calmly. Make sure that they understand the need for this training and are also able to communicate during the course of it.
- Individuals may learn better with visual aids as visual information may be more effectively than verbal information, so employ illustrations, gestures and objects as much as you can in training for an emergency escape.
- Carry your favorite things and articles to stay focused and preoccupied.

The main purpose of this book was to start you on a path to creating an emergency plan for you and your loved ones. Additional resources can be found at the resources listed below:

American Red Cross: <http://www.redcross.org/get-help>

American Red Cross: <http://www.redcross.org/prepare/location/home-family/disabilities>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): <http://emergency.cdc.gov/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):
<http://www.cdc.gov/features/emergencypreparedness/>

Disability.gov: <https://www.disability.gov/resource/disability-govs-guide-emergency-preparedness-disaster-recovery/>

FEMA: <https://www.ready.gov/individuals-access-functional-needs>

My Emergency To Go Workbook For

Name:

Date:

**If you like,
you can**

Paste a Picture Here

Emergency Contact Information Sheet

Please complete this form and distribute copies to your emergency support team

Name:		Nick Name:		DOB:	
Address:					
City:		State:		Zip code:	
Home Phone #:		Cell #:			
Social Security #: (Optional)		Email:			

General Background Information

Language:		Ethnicity:			
Marital Status:		Has Children:	Y	N	If yes, how many
Height:		Weight:			

My Disability is	Autism	Cerebral Palsy	Epilepsy	Intellectual Disability	Other
MH related concerns	ADHD	Fragile X	TBI	Physical Disability	Other

1. Local emergency contact person(s):	Emergency person's #:	Relationship:
2. Local emergency contact person(s):	Emergency person's #:	Relationship:
3. Out of State emergency contact person(s):	Emergency person's #:	Relationship:

Network members/People who are important to me:	Network members' home/work numbers:

Cautions for Emergency Medical Technicians

How best to communicate with me:	
	Speaking
	Using Sign Language
	Using a communication device
	Non-Verbal Vocalization/Using gestures
	Other

When Communicating I use:				
Verbal: Communicates in	Full sentences	Phrases	Single words	Other
An Assistive Device	PECS	Dynavox	IPAD	Other

Emergency Contact Information Sheet Health Information

Name:		Nick Name:		DOB:	
Abilities:					
Mobility: Ambulatory	walk w/no concerns	walk with gait	walks unsteady	other	
Mobility: Non-ambulatory	use a wheelchair	cane	walker	other	
Memory/Thought/Cognitive:					
Eating/Drinking/Toileting					
This is my diet type	Regular	diabetic	salt restricted	other	
This is how my food is prepared	Regular	chopped	pureed	other	
This is how I eat	with utensils	with my hands	with assistance	other	
This is how I drink	Regular	bottle/sippy cup	with assistance	other	
This is how I use the bathroom	Independently	need support	wear diapers	other	
Health Information:					
Type of Health Ins:		Policy #			
Blood Type:		Allergies			
Medical equipment/things I use:					
I use the following equipment:	Glasses	Hearing aids	Service Animal	other	
Durable Medical Equipment:	Life Support Equipment:	Oxygen Tank		other	
Primary Physician:					
Phone#:		Specialty:			
Address:		Emergency #			
City:		State:		Zip Code:	
Medication Information: Note: Bring Pill Bottles					
This is how I take my medication:		By myself	With Reminders	other	
Date of Review:					
Name:		Dosage		Frequency	
Prescribing Physician:					
Reason for medication:					
Any known side effect					
Date of Review:					
Name:		Dosage		Frequency	
Prescribing Physician:					
Reason for medication:					
Any known side effect:					
Date of Review:					
Name:		Dosage		Frequency	
Prescribing Physician:					
Reason for medication:					
Any known side effect:					

Emergency Contact Information Sheet
Programs that may know me and My Likes/Dislikes

Name:		Nick Name:		DOB:	
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Programs that I work with

These are the programs that assist me:

This is my Support Coordination Agency:

Support Person Name:		Phone #:	
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Email:		Fax #:	
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This is my Provider Agency:

Support Person Name:		Phone #:	
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Email:		Fax #:	
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My Likes and Dislikes

Things that I like (people, places, things, activities that create excitement, happiness, and engagement):

This is how I show I'm happy:

Things that I do not like (people, places, things, activities that cause me to be upset, angry, sadness and/or frustration):

This is how I show my anger:

If I'm scared this is how I react:

When I'm scared this is how I react:

I understand best when (shown, shown and told how, using hand-over-hand techniques):

I need help with:

What people need to know about me to keep me healthy, safe and happy:

RCM's Quick Reference Sheet for an Emergency

In case of an emergency and you need to leave your house immediately, and do not have an Emergency Backpack/"Go Bag"



- **Emergency Contact/Emergency Book**



- **Cell Phone, Cell Phone Charger**



- **Wallet, ID Card, Keys**



- **Medications**



- **Flashlight**



- **Water**

- **Other**

- **Other**

- **Other**

RCM's Quick Reference Sheet for an Emergency Items to place in your DIY - Emergency Backpack "Go Bag"



- **3-day Supply of Food & Water, Manual Can Opener**



- **Personal Care Items: soap, toothbrush, toothpaste**



- **Flashlight, First Aid Kit, Whistle, Radio, Batteries**



- **Medical Equipment: Walker, Cane, Hearing Aids**



- **Contact Lenses, Glasses, Asthma Inhaler, etc.**



- **Emergency Contact/Emergency Book**



- **Cell Phone, Cell Phone Charger**



- **3-day Supply of all Medications**



- **Wallet, ID Card, Keys**

- **Other**

RCM's Quick Reference Sheet for an Emergency

Copies of Documents for your DIY - Emergency Backpack "Go Bag"

- **Bank/Debit Card, Credit Cards/ Checking/Savings Account #**
- **Make/Model/Serial Numbers for durable medical equipment**
- **SS Disability Award Letter, SSI Award Letter, Extra Money**
- **Birth or Death Certificates, Social Security Card**
- **Mortgage Deed, Lease Agreement, Utility Bill**
- **Insurance Policies: Life, Health, Home, Car**
- **Prescription/Medical/Health Plan and Card**
- **Driver's License, Photo ID, Passport**
- **Online Username/Password**
- **Other**

RCM's Quick Reference Sheet for Emergency Contacts



- **Dial 911 for Emergency Only**



- **Police Non-Emergency**



- **Poison Control Center**



- **Fire Non-Emergency**



- **Primary Doctor**

- **Other**

- **Other**

- **Other**

Sources:

American Red Cross: <http://www.redcross.org/get-help>

American Red Cross: <http://www.redcross.org/prepare/location/home-family/disabilities>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): <http://www.cdc.gov/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): <http://emergency.cdc.gov/>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC):

<http://www.cdc.gov/features/emergencypreparedness/>

Disability.gov: <https://www.disability.gov/resource/disability-govs-guide-emergency-preparedness-disaster-recovery/>

FEMA: <https://www.ready.gov/individuals-access-functional-needs>