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Natural Disaster Resources for Families Affected by Autism

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Planning is an important part of any family affected by autism's daily routine, but is even more important when it comes to being prepared before, during and after any type of natural disaster. The following tips to assist families with creating emergency preparedness and response plans have been adapted from Autism Speaks resources, recommendations from [Ready.gov \(http://www.ready.gov/\)](http://www.ready.gov/), FEMA, and the RedCross.

Hurricanes and other natural disasters can be difficult for persons with autism. Sesame Street has put together this video and guide for families following a natural disaster.

- [Support After An Emergency \(http://www.sesamestreet.org/toolkits/emergencies\)](http://www.sesamestreet.org/toolkits/emergencies)
- [Here for Each Other: Helping Families After a Hurricane \(http://www.sesamestreet.org/sites/default/files/media_folders/Images/SupportAfterEmergency_Printable_Hurricane_FamilyGuide.pdf\)](http://www.sesamestreet.org/sites/default/files/media_folders/Images/SupportAfterEmergency_Printable_Hurricane_FamilyGuide.pdf)

FEMA information for Hurricane Harvey: <https://www.fema.gov/hurricane-harvey> (<https://www.fema.gov/hurricane-harvey>)

Prepare for Hurricane Irma - ASD Plan: <http://blog.thepowerofonemarch.org/436-2/> (<http://blog.thepowerofonemarch.org/436-2/>)

iPads (and other medical equipment) that are used by someone with autism to communicate are covered under medical losses/disability equipment. During the intake call with FEMA, you may be asked about medical devices, and whether anyone is dependent on a computer or other equipment. This does include iPads and potentially even things like weighted blankets, headphones, and foods for a special diet. FEMA won't ask specifically about these things, so make sure you mention if you have lost disability/medical equipment.

If you have already applied for assistance through FEMA, you can also update your application and add more information/claims by calling the hotline.

FEMA disaster recovery assistance centers can provide in-person assistance and are located in several spots, people can text 4FEMA (43362) "DRC" + their zip code to get their nearest DRC, or go here: [www.FEMA.gov/DRC \(http://www.fema.gov/DRC\)](http://www.fema.gov/DRC) to find your closest assistance center.

We also encourage you to reach out to the national Red Cross for assistance in temporary shelter, food and clothing: <http://www.redcross.org/get-help>

(<http://www.redcross.org/get-help>) We hope these resources are a helpful start for you and your family. If there is anything else we can do to help, please let us know. Wishing you all the best going forward!

Basic Preparedness Tips:

- Know where to go. If you are ordered to evacuate, know the local hurricane evacuation route(s) to take and have a plan for where you can stay. Contact your local emergency management agency for more information.
- Put together a [disaster supply kit \(http://www.ready.gov/kit\)](http://www.ready.gov/kit), including a flashlight, batteries, cash, first aid supplies, and copies of your critical information if you need to evacuate.
- If you are not in an area that is advised to evacuate and you decide to stay in your home, plan for adequate supplies in case you lose power and water for several days and you are not able to leave due to flooding or blocked roads.
- Make a family [emergency communication plan. \(http://www.ready.gov/make-a-plan\)](http://www.ready.gov/make-a-plan)
- Many communities have text or email alerting systems for emergency notifications. To find out what alerts are available in your area, search the Internet with your town, city, or county name and the word "alerts".
- FEMA's [Preparedness Timeline \(http://www.ready.gov/hurricanes\)](http://www.ready.gov/hurricanes) provides a 36 hour timeline with tips on how to prepare.

Evacuating your home - some important things to remember:

- Grab your IEP and any pertinent medical records or evaluations you may have on hand. Your IEP is a federal document and can help you settle your child in an alternate school setting more quickly if you have it on hand.
- Bring identification for your children: birth certificates, passports, etc.
- Make copies of important documents such as family records, medical records, wills, deeds, social security numbers, bank account information, and tax records. It is best to keep these documents both in a waterproof container and stored online. If there is any information related to medical equipment that you rely on, include those in your emergency kit as well, and also make sure that a trusted friend or family member has a copy of these documents.
- Check your insurance policy about flood and disaster coverage to see what additional requirements may be needed to file a claim more quickly.
- Make an emergency contact list - even if you have them saved in your phone you should also write them down! Include the names and numbers of everyone in your personal support net-work, as well as your medical providers, local law enforcement, emergency responders, the Coast Guard.

- Make sure your emergency information list notes any communication difficulties, including the the best way to communicate with you or your loved one with autism.
- Pack any needed Assisted Technology Devices and don't forget the chargers! Just in case record the device name, manufacturer's name & information, model and serial numbers, vendor (Store's/Seller's) name and info, date of purchase and copy of receipt if available, copy of Doctor's or Therapist's prescription if available and contact and funder's (i.e., Medicare, Medicaid, Insurance Co.) name, contact info, & policy numbers.
- Pack enough medicines or special dietary needs for at least three weeks. Shipments of new supplies to impacted areas may be difficult or impossible. Bring copies of prescriptions with you or be sure you have refills scheduled with a national pharmacy that can access them electronically.
- If you regularly visit doctors or specialist for treatments or interventions or if you receive regular services such as home health care, treatment or transportation, talk to your service provider about their emergency plans. Identify back-up service providers in the areas you might evacuate to. If you use medical equipment in your home that requires electricity to operate, talk to your health care provider about what you can do to prepare for its use during a power outage.
- If you have a service animal, be sure to include food, water, and collar with ID tag, medical records and other emergency pet supplies.
- Remember to bring familiar items that will help your child adjust to their new surroundings and ease the stress of the transition with some of their comforts from home – favorite toys, DVDs and computer games.
- During an emergency quick and unanticipated changes in routine and environment can cause increased anxiety and stress for people with autism. If staying in a shelter bring headphones or earplugs to help with noise. You may also consider bringing a role of duct tape to place labels, visual support or even lay out visible perimeters of your family's assigned "space" in a communal style shelter.
- Use [Visual Supports \(https://www.autismspeaks.org/science/resources-programs/autism-treatment-network/tools-you-can-use/visual-supports\)](https://www.autismspeaks.org/science/resources-programs/autism-treatment-network/tools-you-can-use/visual-supports) and [Social Stories \(https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/office-forms-stories\)](https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/office-forms-stories) – these resources can help a person with autism more clearly understand, process and cope with changes in environment and routine.
- With any weather/water related emergency, electricity can be interrupted affecting bank ATMs and gas pumps. Be sure to have your car gas tanks full and additional gas on hand. Take cash out prior to evacuating as credit cards may not work due to electrical interruptions.
- When you leave your home cut off the main electrical grid and gas main to the house. This will make it safer for officials, flood recovery personnel and for your return.
- Register with FEMA.gov ahead of time. Or keep up with their mobile site while on the move. You can call 1(800) 621-3362 for assistance.
- Call the Red Cross prior to evacuating to ask them which shelters accommodate people with special needs. Upon arrival to any shelter, let them know your child has autism and fully explain all of your child's specific needs. Ask if there is a secure room or office where your family could stay if your child is a wandering risk.
- Remember children and adults with autism may be particularly drawn to water or at risk of natural disaster hazards. If you are facing a natural disaster with waters rising this quickly you will want to take extra precautions if you are not fully out of harm's way. Floodwaters are full of debris and bacteria, so stay out of them.
- If your loved one with autism has a tendency to wander from safety, make sure you have a multifaceted safety plan in place. Click here for Autism Speaks [wandering prevention resources \(https://www.autismspeaks.org/wandering-resources\)](https://www.autismspeaks.org/wandering-resources) you can use to develop a plan to keep your child safe.
- It is a good idea for every family to have an emergency plan in place to know what you would do during a crisis or natural disaster. Autism Speaks funded the creation of the [Emergency and Disaster Preparedness Guidebook \(https://science.grants.autismspeaks.org/search/grants/emergencydisaster-preparedness\)](https://science.grants.autismspeaks.org/search/grants/emergencydisaster-preparedness), which can help you create a family communication plan, keep your emergency contacts organized, and share more information about your child's special needs.

Autism Speaks Resources & Information:

- Autism Speaks [Cares \(https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/financial-assistance\)](https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/financial-assistance) program provides grants for individuals with autism during times of crisis and natural disasters.
- The [Autism Speaks Autism Response Team \(https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/autism-response-team\)](https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/autism-response-team) (both English and Spanish speaking) are available to provide information and resources during this difficult time. Call 1-888-288-4762, en Español 888-772-9050 or email us at familyservices@autismspeaks.org (<mailto:familyservices@autismspeaks.org>)
- The [Autism Safety Project \(https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/autism-safety-project\)](https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/autism-safety-project) provides information for families and First Responders with information and guidelines for communicating with individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in emergency situations.
- [Autism Speaks Resource Guide \(https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/resource-guide\)](https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/resource-guide) is our national database of autism service providers. You can use the Resource Guide to find local autism service providers in your area, including medical professionals, intervention providers, advocates, support groups and more.

Coping with Disaster:

- [Helping a Child Living with Autism to Deal with Disaster - Autism Speaks \(https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/autism-safety-project/helping-children-respond-disaster\)](https://www.autismspeaks.org/family-services/autism-safety-project/helping-children-respond-disaster)
- [Tips for Coping with Disaster - FEMA \(http://www.fema.gov/coping-disaster\)](http://www.fema.gov/coping-disaster)
- [Strategies for Talking and Listening to Kids about Traumatic Events - PBS \(http://www.pbs.org/parents/talkingwithkids/news/talking.html\)](http://www.pbs.org/parents/talkingwithkids/news/talking.html)
- [Tips on Helping Children Feel More Secure - Fred Rogers \(http://www.fredrogers.org/parents/special-challenges/tragic-events.php\)](http://www.fredrogers.org/parents/special-challenges/tragic-events.php)

Disaster Relief Resources:

- [American Red Cross \(http://www.redcross.org/\)](http://www.redcross.org/) - Find help in your area. Find an open shelter, search the safe and well listings, and read disaster recovery guides.
- [Federal Emergency Management Agency \(http://www.fema.gov/\)](http://www.fema.gov/) - FEMA's mission is to support our citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain, and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from, and mitigate all hazards.
- [Find a Disaster Recovery Center Near You \(http://www.fema.gov/disaster-recovery-centers%3chttp://www.fema.gov/disaster-recovery-centers\)](http://www.fema.gov/disaster-recovery-centers%3chttp://www.fema.gov/disaster-recovery-centers) - A Disaster Recovery Center is a readily accessible facility or mobile office where applicants may go for information about FEMA or other disaster assistance programs, or for questions related to your case.
- [Contact Your Local Emergency Information Management Office \(https://www.fema.gov/emergency-management-agencies\)](https://www.fema.gov/emergency-management-agencies) - Some local emergency management offices maintain registers of people with disabilities so you can be located and assisted quickly in a disaster. Contact your local emergency management agency to see if these services exist where you live or visit [ready.gov \(http://www.ready.gov/\)](http://www.ready.gov/) to find links to government offices in your area.

Explore more: [Family Services \(/section/family-services\)](#), [Autism Safety Project \(/site-wide/autism-safety-project\)](#), [First Responders \(/site-wide/first-responders\)](#), [Hurricane \(/site-wide/hurricane\)](#), [Safety \(/site-wide/safety\)](#)

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