



Disaster Preparedness Sheltering for Families of Persons with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)

If you or someone you love has autism spectrum disorder (ASD), planning and evacuating for a disaster is crucial. Keep yourself and your loved one safe by developing an inclusive plan specific to your needs. If you find yourself in an emergency shelter, here are some very important actions you can take to prepare your family for a stay:

- Create a written disaster plan that includes important information such as the names and contact information for family members, doctors, therapists, pharmacies, etc. and a list of triggers for behavior issues. Include a list of medications and insurance information. Keep copies of the plan, at home, in the car, with other members of your Personal Support Network, on a USB drive, and/or your smartphone.
- Use your Personal Support Networks to define common plans to help each other in shelters. Be sure to include people intimately familiar with ASD behaviors and solutions who could be helpful to your family.
- Make a Go Kit. Include items such as medications, foods (if there are dietary issues or restrictions), special toys or objects that bring calm or focus, shaded glasses, a music player and headphones.
- Repeatedly practice the disaster plan with the person who has ASD and use visual aids. This will help provide a comforting, calming, familiarity to the person with ASD. Practicing also allows you to know what items the individual will have the biggest issues with, be it sights, sounds or movement. This allows you to proactively make any necessary adjustments to your disaster plans.
- Ensure the individual wears a medical alert bracelet or carries other identification. You will want to educate the shelter staff on the issue of wandering.

- Visit FLGetAPlan.com to learn more about how to prepare yourself, your family, and your pets in the event of an emergency and develop an individual disaster plan.
- If needed, register for the Special Needs Registry at FLGetAPlan.com. Once registered, reach out to the agencies/organizations managing the local emergency shelters to discuss how both parties can better prepare to host a person with ASD.

Source: Newman, P. (8 August 2016). Developing effective strategies to shelter autistic citizens during and after emergencies. Florida State Emergency Response Team, Emergency Support Function 6 - Mass Care; Monarch Center for Autism, Autism Society of North Carolina.

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