

EMERGENCY PLANNING FOR PEOPLE WITH AUTISM AND SENSORY NEEDS

Communication

What items help you communicate?

- Cell phone, Ipad, text to speech device
- Communication board
- Picture cards
- Pre-recorded messages

Practice communicating your wants and needs.

Making the decision to stay or leave

The decision to stay or leave can be difficult when you or someone you care for has autism or sensory needs because changes in routine and environment can cause imbalances that result in serious challenges.

- Are you being advised to leave?
- Can you maintain everyone's health and safety at home for 96 hours?
- Will leaving put you or your loved one in more danger than staying?
 - Do you have the supports needed to evacuate?
 - Develop an ongoing plan with any supports (family, friends, direct service worker, support coordinators, doctors, etc) that includes both staying and leaving.
 - Is someone able to accompany you to help manage any care or challenges that come up if you leave?
 - Is there something that will make it easier for the person with sensory needs to stay or leave? This includes medications, specific items, etc.
 - If your loved one's behavior puts them at an increased risk of hurting themselves or someone else, contact your support coordinator and local emergency manager to discuss your concerns before an emergency.

Staying

- Can you maintain your health and well-being if there is no electricity, water, or access to supplies, or community activities?
- Do you or your loved one rely on electricity for devices for communication, coping, entertainment?
- Keep in mind that staying may also be challenging for those with autism or sensory needs in regards to changes with routine and environment.

Leaving

Possible stressors:

- Loud noises
- Large crowds
- Unfamiliar smells
- Change in routine or plans

What items help you stay calm?

- Fidgets
- Chewy tubes or necklaces
- Weighted blanket
- Noise cancelling headphones
- Favorite toy
- Thin blanket to hide under
- Stroller/adaptive stroller with umbrella
- First-then boards or social stories

Transportation

- Specialized or adaptive car seats.
- Transportation may be much longer than usual. Plan for travel to take 4 times longer than usual.
 - Be sure to pack some activities to help those with autism or sensory needs stay calm.

Sheltering

- Possibly practice sleeping away from home
- Social stories about sleeping away from home
- Talk to the shelter manager about things that may help the individual with autism or sensory needs cope better. They may have suggestions or be able to help.

Returning Home

Returning home after a weather event may be very difficult for a person with autism or sensory needs. Things may look very different. The area may have a different smell. Even if your home has not received damage. The area just may feel different due to increased anxiety and emotions.

Try to get back to your routine as quickly as possible.