

MY SAFETY PLAN

A Family Guide to Emergency Preparedness
with Autism in Mind



By Beth Wyatt
Autism Ready Response

BE PREPARED

Everyone should prepare for disasters, which have the potential to impact our lives without warning. Hazards such as wildfires, earthquakes, hurricanes, and terrorist attacks can significantly threaten our communities, homes, and daily routines. The needs of people with autism present even more challenges for their families and caretakers when a disaster occurs. Thoughtful preparation can go a long way toward successfully navigating an emergency situation.

When a disaster strikes, you may suddenly find yourself away from home without the daily comforts you and your child depend on. For someone with autism, a shift in routine can be upsetting under ideal circumstances and detrimental during a disaster.

Some disasters seem like obvious disrupters of our lives and our routines. Floods, hurricanes, and earthquakes are likely to cause significant damage to our communities. Other events, such as widespread power outages, chemical spills, or extreme hot or cold temperatures, can be less obvious and may catch communities off guard.

This booklet will help you and your child prepare together for emergencies by thoughtfully considering your child’s sensory, communication, and medical needs before your community is impacted.



SENSORY SENSITIVITIES

Often, people with autism have heightened sensitivities to environmental factors such as sound, smell, visual stimulation, taste, touch, and changes in temperature.

A change in just one of these can be overwhelming for your child and can lead to a meltdown. This book will help you consider ways to mitigate these challenges for your child.



MEDICAL CONCERNS

Consider your child’s medical needs, including medication, supplements, or items that may help keep them comfortable and emotionally regulated.



COMMUNICATION

Is your child able to communicate with emergency personnel? What can you do to help your child communicate? Tablets, icons, and dry-erase boards can be helpful for your child when they’re around unfamiliar people.

WHAT DO YOU NEED TO PREPARE?

Because children with autism can have difficulties adapting to new situations, preparation is key to helping them cope during a disaster. Preparing beforehand ensures that your child’s medical, sensory, and communication needs are met, regardless of the emergency. Sharing the plan with your child helps them understand what to expect when the unexpected happens.

The seven worksheets in this guide are designed to help you plan the best way to address the specialized needs of your child in an emergency.

MAKE A FAMILY PLAN (PAGE 6)

A family disaster plan keeps all vital information about your family in one place. In the plan, you can include your personal medical information, emergency contacts, shelter alternatives, and information about your family members, which can help emergency responders understand their individual needs.

MAKE AN EMERGENCY KIT (PAGE 8)

This checklist will help you put together the essential items you’ll need in an emergency to either shelter in place or evacuate.

PACK A GO BAG (PAGE 10)

Learn what you can pack in your go bag to keep your child calm and regulated during a disaster.

MAKE A PLAN FOR EVACUATIONS (PAGE 12)

Plan for where you and your family can stay if you’re forced to leave your home.

MAKE A SHELTER-IN-PLACE PLAN (PAGE 14)

Have supplies on hand in case you need to shelter in place.

IDENTIFY YOUR SUPPORT NETWORK (PAGE 16)

Know who can assist you and your family. Think of people you know who are familiar with your child’s needs and abilities.

ABOUT ME (PAGE 18)

This worksheet can be filled out by your child, or you can work on it together. It will help you keep track of vital information that you’ll need in case of emergency.

UNDERSTANDING HAZARDS

Many disasters create hazardous conditions that everyone should be aware of. Here are some common ones. With your child, identify and circle the hazards you see in the picture. Can you think of additional hazards in your area to watch out for? List the different hazards in your area that could affect your family. How many days might you be away from home?



FLOODING



HURRICANES



TORNADOES



WILDFIRES



POWER OUTAGES



EXTREME HEAT



EARTHQUAKES



HOUSE FIRES



WINTER STORMS

MAKE A FAMILY PLAN

A family plan organizes all disaster plans. Discussing the plan and the steps your family may have to take during a disaster with your child can help them cope with the change. Everyone in the family should be familiar with the plan.



Communication. A preplanned group text is a great way to reach everyone at once. Include an out-of-town contact so they can stay up-to-date with your family’s plans.
Make a list of people for your group text:

Name:	Phone #:
Name:	Phone #:
Name:	Phone #:
Name:	Phone #:
Name:	Phone #:



Information. Getting up-to-date information is extremely important in an emergency. Pay attention to wireless alerts on your cell phone. Your local police departments, emergency preparedness department, and radio and TV stations are also great sources of information.
Note the sources you can rely on in an emergency for local information:

Local radio station:	Local TV station:
Local police/emergency prep division:	



Evacuation route. What options do you have for leaving your immediate area?

Home address:
Evacuation route:
School address:
Evacuation route:
Work address:
Evacuation route:



Reunification spot. If your home is unavailable, is there a safe location that everyone in the family can get to?

Reunification spot address:



Emergency contacts Make sure everyone in the family has a list of emergency contacts. If your child can’t reach you in an emergency, is there someone your child knows and trusts who can help them find their way to your family?

Emergency contacts:

Name:	Phone #:
Name:	Phone #:
Name:	Phone #:
Name:	Phone #:
Name:	Phone #:



Designate someone to be responsible for returning home, if it’s safe, to grab pets, go bags, and the family emergency kit.

Who will return home: _____

What they’ll get:



Essential documents should be protected—one good option is a fireproof and/or flood-proof lockbox. You should also consider giving copies of essential documents to a trusted friend or family member for safekeeping.

Who would you trust with your essential documents?: _____

List documents here:

EMERGENCY KITS

With your family, talk about putting together your emergency kit. An emergency-kit conversation should address the following:

- **What your family will take with you in the event of an evacuation**
- **Where your kit should be kept so it's easily accessible in an evacuation**
- **What to pack in your child's go bag**

Your emergency kit can be used for evacuations or sheltering in place. In a disaster, it may take emergency responders time to reach everyone. You should plan on having enough supplies for 72 hours.



BASIC EMERGENCY KIT CHECKLIST

- ☐ A three-day supply of water
- ☐ Food: nonperishable, easy-to-prepare items that your child will eat
- ☐ Medications (7-day supply) and medical items
- ☐ Flashlight
- ☐ Battery-powered or hand-cranked radio
- ☐ Extra batteries
- ☐ First-aid kit
- ☐ Multipurpose tool
- ☐ Sanitation and personal hygiene items (favorite toothpaste, soaps, and any other items your child might be particular about)
- ☐ Supplies for toileting needs (if applicable)
- ☐ Copies of personal documents (medication list and pertinent medical information, proof of address, deed/lease to home, passports, birth certificates, insurance policies)
- ☐ Family and emergency contact information (including contacts for teachers, therapists, and service providers)
- ☐ Extra cash
- ☐ Blankets
- ☐ Map(s) of the area

ADDITIONAL ITEMS YOU MAY WANT TO CONSIDER

- ☐ Extra visuals for communication (visual schedule, icons, whiteboard, and pens)
- ☐ A backup tablet or communication device
- ☐ Sensory-regulation items (headphones, weighted supports, fidgets, teethingers, scented sprays)
- ☐ Comfort items (favorite toy, blanket, stuffed animal)
- ☐ A toy, game, or book for distraction
- ☐ Incentives for cooperation (favorite candy, snacks, small toys)
- ☐ Photos of positive memories (family and friends)

PACKING YOUR CHILD’S GO BAG

A go bag is a bag or backpack with essentials for your child. It should be kept in an easily accessible place, like under their bed or by the front door. This way, they can grab it if you have to leave the house.

Directions: With your child, choose items to fill their go bag. Think of items that your child will need to calm themselves. What items bring them comfort? Are there items that help them regulate? Do they have a favorite nonperishable snack that can be included? The bag should be light enough for them to carry on their own.

GO-BAG SUGGESTIONS

- Favorite toy/stuffed animal/doll
- Fidget
- Books/magazines/comics
- Chargers for electronics
- Tablet/phone
- Headphones
- Spare clothes
- Spare shoes
- Batteries
- Flashlight
- Snacks
- Blanket



SERVICE ANIMALS AND PETS

As you’re planning where your family can go if you’re forced to leave your house, be sure to include pets and service animals.

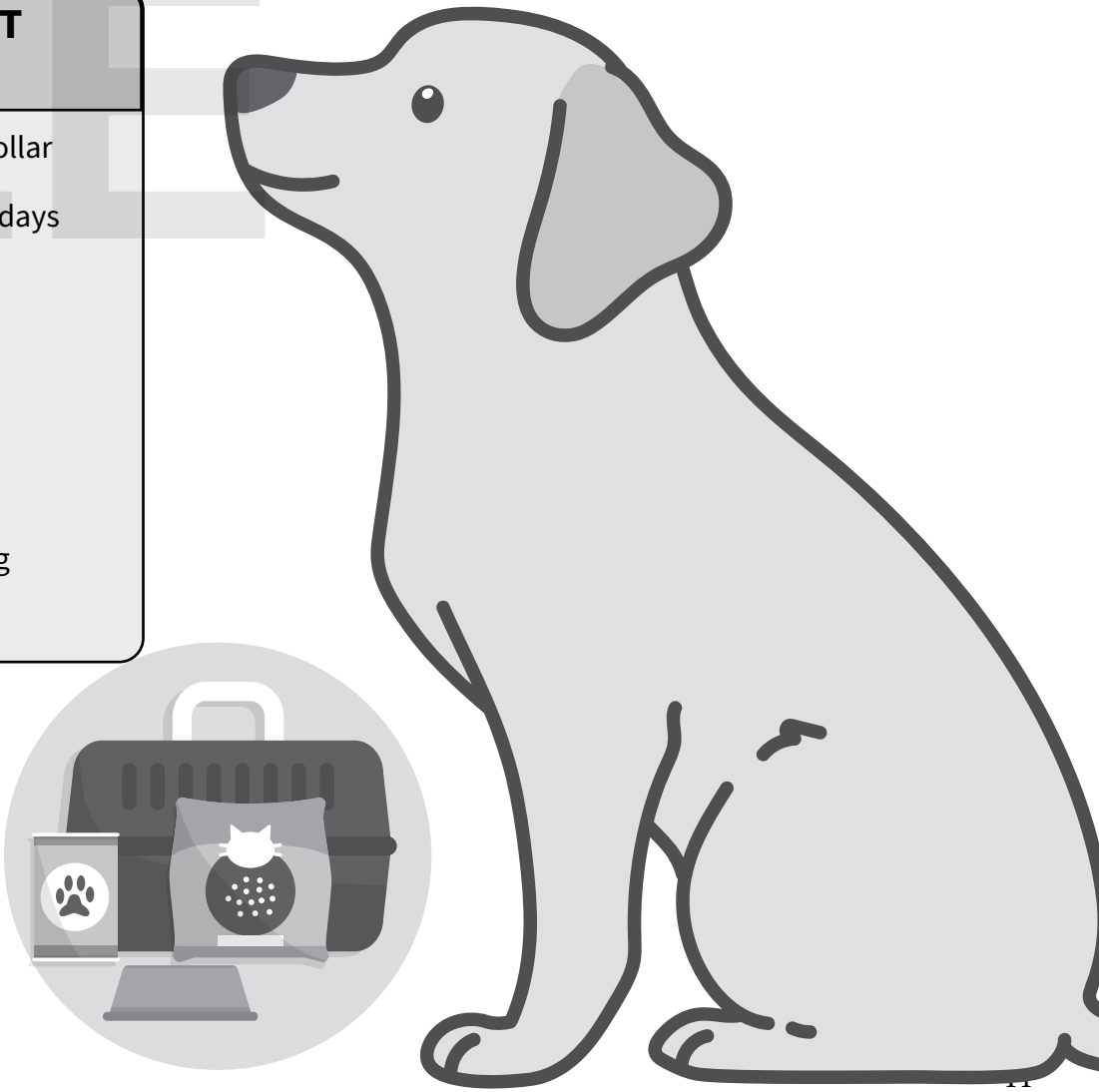
There are rights regarding service animals that don’t apply to pets. A service animal is generally allowed in places such as hotels and restaurants when pets aren’t. What is a service animal? The Americans with Disabilities Act recognizes a service animal as a dog trained to do specific tasks to mitigate an identified disability.

When deciding where to go during an evacuation, make sure you ask about whether your pet can accompany you. Check with hotels about pets and service animals before you arrive. Some hotels have extra fees for pets.

In addition to a go bag for every person in your house, you should have a bag of supplies for your pet or service animal. Use the checklist below to make your pet a go bag.

SERVICE ANIMAL/PET GO-BAG CHECKLIST

- ☐ Service vest, leash, and collar
- ☐ Food and water for three days
- ☐ Food and water bowls
- ☐ Medication
- ☐ Grooming supplies
- ☐ Travel crate or bed
- ☐ Documentation, including vaccination records



EVACUATION PLAN

A disaster may force you to leave your home. For a child with autism, an unfamiliar setting can be stressful. What factors should you consider when thinking of alternative locations in which to shelter?

- What safety concerns do you have for your child?
- Is your child sensitive to loud noises or strange smells?
- Does your child wander or bolt from safety?

Mass public shelters may not be suitable for your family. A friend’s or relative’s house or a nearby hotel may be a better option.

Identify two or more alternative shelter options for you and your family if you’re required to leave your house. Introduce your child to these spaces so they will already be familiar with them during an emergency. A smooth transition from the familiarity of home to an alternative location will help your child feel safe. Consider having one or two options nearby and a backup option out of the area. A significant portion of your community may be impacted in a major disaster.

EVACUATION LOCATION #1

Name:
Address:
Phone:
Driving route:

EVACUATION LOCATION #2

Name:
Address:
Phone:
Driving route:

Evacuation routes

Sometimes, even taking an unfamiliar route home or to a familiar location can cause anxiety for someone with autism. Having a predictable routine helps people with autism stay regulated. Imagine being in the middle of a disaster and away from home and driving down unfamiliar roads or taking public transportation. The more familiar your child is with your evacuation plan and routes, the less likely they will be to experience additional anxiety during a disaster.

- Identify several different routes to use to get to your destination. If you depend on major highways, consider alternative routes.
- Drive the routes with your family. Give your child a printed map so they can follow along and know the route to safety.

Practice with your family. Pack your go bags, evacuation kit, and pets in the car and make a day of it.

Safety and sensory concerns

Identify your child’s sensory sensitivities and any safety considerations you have. The following are some tips to help them stay safe and regulated away from home.

- Keep sensory-regulation tools (such as headphones and fidgets) easily accessible in your child’s go bag. They should be able to get to them independently or with minimal assistance.
- Have a plan for being in an unfamiliar area. Assign one parent or capable friend or family member to be with your child at all times.
- Remind your child of common hazards such as busy roads or bodies of water.
- Teach them how to recognize a community helper if they get separated from family. Have your information printed on their go bag so they have it with them.

SHELTER IN PLACE

Some emergencies, such as public health emergencies, may require you to shelter in your home. Losing access to daily routines outside the house can be stressful for children with autism. Take a moment to think about the following questions so you can be better prepared for a situation where you need to shelter in place.

What foods does your child need to be comfortable at home?

Think about the food your child eats. Do they have dietary limitations? List some shelf-stable foods you can keep on hand for emergencies.

How long can your family stay comfortably inside without needing more supplies?

--

Can you combine resources with a neighbor or someone from your support network?

--

Internet and power outages

Electronic devices are common tools for self-regulation and entertainment. It can be hard for children with autism to understand power and WiFi outages.

Keep backup battery packs charged and available. Small portable generators can help keep electronics powered and lights on. **NEVER use a fuel-powered generator indoors.** Always follow the manufacturer’s instructions and use only in a well-ventilated area. Consider using solar chargers or backup batteries.

Download games and movies on mobile devices in case there’s no internet access.

Do you have a backup option if your internet goes down? Can you rent a hotspot at your local library? Use this space to list alternative options for your child’s mobile device needs.

Disruption in daily routines

It can be hard for a child to understand that they can’t leave the house. What can you do with your child to replace routine outings?

Do you have alternative, in-home activities that can keep your child regulated? Art projects, obstacle courses, or a new book can help keep your child calm and occupied if you need to shelter in place. List some here.

Make a schedule

All children thrive on consistency, and this is especially true of children on the autism spectrum, but maintaining a consistent schedule in a shelter-in-place situation can be challenging. Planning a daily schedule can help. Use this space to plan what your day might be like:

7am
9am
11am
1pm
3pm
6pm

SUPPORT NETWORK

Identifying your support network ahead of time will save valuable time in a disaster if you need assistance. A personal support network can help you and your family secure resources before, during, and after an emergency. Reach out to friends and family nearby who can assist you. Ask about their capacity to support you and your family. It's important to understand the level of support your friends and family can offer. Have options inside and outside your immediate area because the severity and range of any future disaster are unpredictable.

SOME HELPFUL QUESTIONS TO ASK:

Can you assist me and my family with transportation in an emergency?

Do you have a space in your house where my child can isolate if they feel overwhelmed?

Are there pets inside the house?

Are our pets/service animals welcome in your house?

Are there hazards nearby (busy roads, water sources, aggressive animals)?

Can you keep nonperishable foods on hand that my child will eat?

Does anyone else depend on your assistance in an emergency?

How many days can you house and/or support my family?

If you're unable to stay at the home of friends or family, is there a hotel nearby where you can stay?

When you've identified your support network, list their names, addresses, and contact numbers on the opposite page. There's also a space to write down additional notes, such as a detail that will help your child remember where they're going (Grammy's house).

MY SUPPORT NETWORK:

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Driving route:

Additional notes:

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Driving route:

Additional notes:

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Driving route:

Additional notes:

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Driving route:

Additional notes:

ABOUT ME

Sharing specifics about your child’s needs, behaviors, and communication will enable people in your support network to better accommodate your child. This can be as simple as identifying your child’s favorite foods, comfort items, and triggers.

With your child, complete this **About Me** work page. Use the space below to draw, collage, or write in your child’s likes and dislikes.

Name:	Nickname:
Birth date:	
Address:	
Medical diagnosis:	
My doctor’s name:	
My doctor’s phone number:	
My parent/guardian’s name:	
My parent/guardian’s address:	
My parent/guardian’s phone number:	
My parent/guardian’s email:	
Some of my favorite foods are:	
I do not like to eat:	
I get upset when:	
When I am upset, I might:	
I calm myself down by:	
My favorite movie or TV show is:	
This is my favorite toy/object:	
A special treat I like is:	

SAMPLE

RESOURCES

The National Autism Association’s Big Red Safety Box® is a free-of-charge safety toolkit for autism families in need of wandering-prevention tools.

nationalautismassociation.org/big-red-safety-boxes-now-available

Disaster and emergency planning for people with disabilities

www.ready.gov/people-disabilities

Becoming “Red Cross Ready” for an emergency means following simple steps in advance to ensure you can weather a crisis safely and comfortably.

www.redcross.org/get-help/how-to-prepare-for-emergencies/inclusive-preparedness-resources.html



Notice: This book is published by The Education & Outreach Company. Neither The Education & Outreach Company nor its authors, nor any person acting on behalf of The Education & Outreach Company, makes any warranty, express or implied, with respect to the use of any information disclosed in this book or assumes any liability with respect to the use of, or for damages resulting from the use of, any information contained in this book. The recommendations, statistics used, and information provided are strictly for the purpose of informing the user.

©2025 The Education & Outreach Company. All rights reserved.