

syndrome or the effects of a stroke, may also have developmental and cognitive disabilities. Although many people with these types of disability live independently, others, particularly those with significant brain disorders or severe developmental disabilities, may need assistance with nearly every aspect of daily living.

You can take small steps every day to become better able to survive an emergency. Read NOD's general brochure, "Prepare Yourself: Disaster Readiness Tips for People with Disabilities." Identify your resources, develop a support network, make a plan, and create a Ready Kit and a Go Bag. **Start today to become better prepared, safer, and more secure.**

**TIP** Focus on the instructions you are given and follow them. If you don't understand something, look directly at the rescuer, and ask him or her to repeat the information.

## More Information

*Many of these agencies provide materials in accessible formats and different languages.*

### National Organization on Disability/Emergency Preparedness Initiative

<http://www.nod.org/emergency>

### American Association of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities

<http://www.aamr.org>

### Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

<http://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/dd/ddmr.htm>

### Coordinated Campaign for Learning Disabilities: Project Cope

<http://www.ldonline.org>

### Easter Seals (S.A.F.E.T.Y. FIRST program)

<http://www.easter-seals.org>

### Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development

<http://www.nichd.nih.gov/health/topics/asd.cfm>

### Federal Emergency Management Agency

<http://www.fema.gov/plan>

### National Institute of Mental Health

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/attention-deficit-hyperactivity-disorder/complete-index.shtml>

### U.S. Department of Homeland Security

<http://www.ready.gov>

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## NATIONAL ORGANIZATION ON DISABILITY

### Disaster Readiness Tips for

# People with Developmental or Cognitive Disabilities

## Prepare Yourself



### National Organization on Disability/ Emergency Preparedness Initiative

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**T**o be better prepared as a nation, we all must do our part to plan for disasters.

Individuals with or without disabilities can lessen the impact of a disaster by taking steps to prepare before an event occurs.

This brochure is designed to help people with developmental and cognitive disabilities begin to plan for emergencies. Developmental and cognitive disabilities include disorders that may affect a person's ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, do math, or follow instructions. It includes people with dyslexia, an extreme difficulty in reading, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), an inability to focus on necessary tasks. Some people with neurological disorders, such as Tourette

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## Preparedness

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### Assess Your Risks

Learn about hazards that may strike your community (blizzards, earthquakes, tornados, hurricanes, floods, and the like). You can get information from your state and local Emergency Management Agency (EMA) or Homeland Security Office by visiting their Websites. If you don't have computer access, you can get much of this information through brochures from these offices.

### Build a Support Network

Establishing solid relationships with other people is one of the most effective means of surviving a disaster. Create a network of trusted individuals such as family, friends, co-workers, personal attendants, and others who can assist you during an emergency. Familiarize your network with your functional abilities and limitations, and include them in your emergency planning process.

Tell each member of your network one why you need their help. For example, say, "I get so focused on work that I won't hear the fire alarm. Please tell me when it goes off."

### Make a Plan

Make an emergency plan and keep it simple. Practice your plan regularly with members of your support network. Put copies of your plan in several places so you can find it easily. People who must use an augmentative communication device (e.g., laptop, word board), should try to store inexpensive back-up equipment in the same places they keep their plan. Prepare preprinted messages to show to first responders: "I may have difficulty understanding what you are telling me, so please speak slowly and use simple language."

Disasters increase stress, and your coping skills may be adversely affected. If so:

- Don't criticize yourself for this normal reaction.
- Try to find outlets for stress and creative solutions to problems.
- If anxiety about an oncoming hurricane increases your dyslexia, find oral sources of information.
- If your ADHD causes you to lose things, put car keys and other critical items on a lanyard around your neck.

## Ready Kit and Go Bag

A Ready Kit is a supply of items that you will need if you have to shelter in place or rely on your own resources for a few days. A Go Bag has fewer items, but they are the essential ones to take with you if you must evacuate quickly.

See NOD's booklet, *Planning for Hazards: A Guide for People with Functional Needs*, for a list of suggested supplies. Here are a few items of particular interest to people with developmental or cognitive disabilities:

- Medications
- Alternate power source or spare batteries for communication device
- Paper and writing materials
- A favorite item (e.g., small video game or book) to help you maintain focus while waiting in lines

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## Response

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In the response phase, you may require immediate rescue or relocation to a shelter, or both. Often, rescue is accompanied by confusion and noise. People may be shouting at you over the roar of engines from cars, boats, or helicopters.

If you have an auditory perceptual disability, this environment will be difficult for you.

You are responsible for part of that communication. If the rescuer needs to know something vital about you, concentrate on expressing that one fact simply. Think now about how you might describe your disability in a short, meaningful phrase in case your pre-printed messages aren't available.

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## Sheltering

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Sheltering in place at home or work often is the safest and least stressful alternative to evacuation. However, if you can leave your community before a known threat arrives, do it.

If officials order a mandatory evacuation, you must leave. Remaining in the face of a known hazard puts you in danger. Don't expect rescue at the height of an emergency: first responders cannot risk their own lives driving into a chemical cloud or against hurricane-force winds. Long before the evacuation order, set aside money and supplies. It's tough to do on a tight budget, and it requires extra focus, but your life could be at stake.

**TIP** Practice the evacuation route out of your home and workplace until it is ingrained in your memory.

### General and "Special Needs" Shelters

Try to take refuge with friends and family first. Unless you have other severe disabilities, you should have little difficulty as a person with developmental or cognitive disability staying in a public shelter for a short time. If you have additional disabilities, you may have to use the nearest "special needs" shelter, where your medical conditions can receive appropriate attention.

If you are going to a shelter, expect that conditions in the shelter will be crowded, noisy, and boring. But these facilities, usually run by American Red Cross chapters or community-based agencies, can save your life.

### Sheltering Tips

People with developmental or cognitive disabilities have a right under the Americans with Disabilities Act to use general public shelters. Since such disabilities may not be visible, follow these suggestions:

- Consult the shelter doctor or nurse if you believe your medication (or lack of medication) is creating medical problems.
- If you have an audio perceptual disability, work particularly hard to understand the environment. Watch body language so you will know when it's a good time to ask a question of a shelter staff member or other occupant.
- Some disabilities can cause people to say the first thing that pops into their head, so think carefully before you speak. People under the stress of shelter life may not understand your condition.