

# Preparing Your Child for Disaster

A Guide for Parents and Caregivers of Autistic Dependents

Developed by

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# Preparing Your Child for Disaster

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# Why do you need to **prepare?**

By preparing ahead of time, families and caregivers can lessen the impacts of disaster on their child with autism. Disasters have the potential to impact our lives without warning. Hazards such as extreme weather, terrorist attacks, or substantial infrastructure damage can significantly impact our communities, homes, and daily routines. For someone with autism, a shift in routine can be upsetting under ideal circumstances and detrimental during a disaster. By preparing ahead of time you can ensure your child's medical, sensory and communication needs are met during an emergency.

## Set Your Family Up for Success by:



Making a Plan



Building a Kit



Staying Informed



Sharing Your Plan with Your Child





# Make a Plan

During a disaster, emergency responders will not be able to get to everyone who needs help. You and your family should be prepared to be on your own for 3-7 days.

- Do you live in a wildland fire interface zone?
- Are you near a faultline? Is your house in a flood zone?
- Do you live in an area impacted by Public Safety Power Shut Offs?

Knowing what hazards impact your community will help guide your family plan.

Make sure your emergency plan addresses sheltering in place and evacuation. Identify where you will keep your plan and your emergency kit. Have a list ready of items you can grab immediately and items you will take with you if you have time to plan your evacuation.



# Build an Emergency Kit



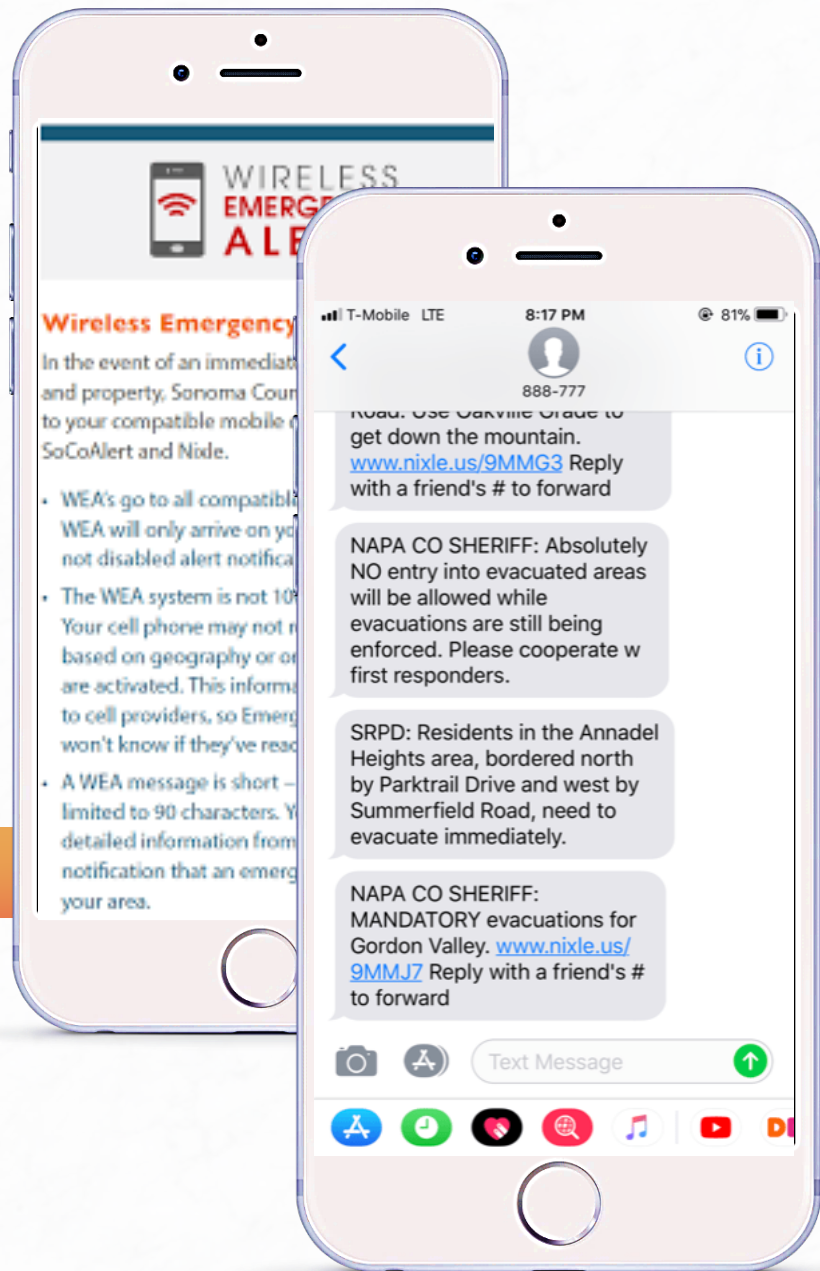
Be prepared for an evacuation by building an emergency kit. Think of additional items that your child uses to communicate, regulate and comfort themselves.

- A three-day supply of food and water.
- Food: non-perishable, easy-to-prepare items that your child will eat.
- Medications (7-day supply) and medical items
- Flashlight
- Battery-powered or hand-crank radio
- Extra batteries
- First aid kit
- Multi-purpose 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)
- Cell phone with chargers
- Family and emergency contact information (including contacts for teachers, therapist, and service providers)
- Extra cash
- Blankets
- Map(s) of the area

## Consider Including:

- Extra visuals for communication (visual schedule, icons, whiteboard, and pens)
- Back up tablet or communication device
- Sensory regulation items (headphones, weighted supports, fidgets, teeters, 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, vacations, pets)

Daylight Savings Time is a great time to refresh your kit and check for expiration dates.



# How To Stay Informed

Subscribing to your local alert system will provide you and your family with vital information during a disaster. Local news and radio stations can also be a good source for up-to-date information. Identify your local sources for information below. Signing up for local alerts is one way to stay informed before, during and after disasters.

## Where Can You Get Your Disaster Information?

- Alert System \_\_\_\_\_
- Law Enforcement Agency \_\_\_\_\_
- Local Fire Department \_\_\_\_\_
- Radio Station \_\_\_\_\_
- Social Media \_\_\_\_\_
- Television Station \_\_\_\_\_



# Shelter in Place

Some emergencies, such as public health emergencies, may require you to shelter in your own home. Losing access to daily routines outside the home can be stressful for children with autism.

What does your child need to be comfortable at home?

## Food & Water

- ▶ 1-2-week supply of food, water (1 gallon of drinking water, per person, per day) and medication.
- ▶ **Think about the food your child eats.** Do they have dietary limitations? Are there a shelf-stable foods you can keep on hand for emergencies?
- ▶ Make sure you have food and water for your service dog or family pets

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## Backup Power

- ▶ Does your child rely on electronic devices for communication or self-regulation? Keep backup battery packs charged and available. Small portable generators can help keep electronics powered and lights on.
- ▶ **Do you have a backup option if your internet goes down?** Are you able to rent a hotspot at your local library?

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## Sensory Regulation Needs

- ▶ Does your child rely on regular outings to stay regulated?
- ▶ **Do you have alternative, in-home activities that can help 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.

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Make a Plan

# Where Can You Go?

- If you had to leave your home, where could you and your family go?
- 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 to meet the needs of your family. A friend 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 are required to leave your house. Introduce your child to these spaces so they can 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. In the event of a major disaster, a significant portion of your community may be impacted. Identify several different routes to use to get to your destination.

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# Special Circumstances

Does your child require specialized medical care or medical devices? Make sure to include in your family plan a document that explains your child's unique medical needs. If you and your child are separated, emergency responders will understand how to care for your child.

Include medical history, medication, medical equipment, and the need for power so emergency responders or disaster workers can assist you and accommodate your needs.



# Plan for Your Service Dog & Pets

When you make your emergency plan, make sure you consider your service dog. If you plan to stay with a friend or family in case of an emergency, make sure you alert them to the presence of your service dog. If you plan to use a shelter or hotel during an evacuation, look into their service dog policies ahead of time. Be familiar with laws and regulations regarding your service dog.

## Service Dog/Pet Emergency Kit

- 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

# Share the Plan with **Your Child**

Sharing your plan with your child will help them understand their role in preparing for emergencies. Allow them to participate in the family plan by packing their own go bag and practicing evacuating the house. The more familiar they are with the plan, the more comfortable they will feel in an emergency.





# My Disaster Plan

If a disaster happens, I know I will be safe because my family made a plan.

I might need to leave my home.

I will bring my emergency bag with me.

In my bag, I will keep these things to help me feel calm:

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I will keep my bag \_\_\_\_\_

so it will be ready to go when my family needs to leave.



## My Disaster Plan

If my home is unsafe, I may need to stay somewhere else.

Here are some of the places we might stay to be safe:

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I can bring my bag with me.





## My Disaster Plan

Things may look different for a while.

Even though I am away from home, I will be with my family.

I can stay prepared for a disaster by:

- Talking to my family about disasters
- Packing my go bag
- Visiting the places I may stay during a disaster



# Additional Resources

[www.socoemergency.org](http://www.socoemergency.org)

A resource providing Sonoma County residence with disaster preparedness, response and recovery information and resources

[www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov)

Information designed to help you and your family be prepared, make a plan, build a kit and get involved

[www.emergency.cdc.gov](http://www.emergency.cdc.gov)

Providing information on disaster preparedness and response

[www.smart911.com](http://www.smart911.com)

Help emergency responders understand the needs of your family





## About the Author

Beth Wyatt has over 15 years of experience as an emergency responder. She is also the proud mother of two children diagnosed with autism. This combination of professional and personal experience makes her uniquely qualified to speak on the challenges of working with patients on the autism spectrum. She has successfully delivered training to departments on recognizing, preventing and deescalating emergencies involving patients impacted by autism.



## About the Designer

Kimberly Bordonaro is an artist who lives in the suburbs of Los Angeles, CA, with her husband and two sons. When not working in her home studio, Kimberly is a brand strategist that helps small businesses with their online marketing. She also works part-time for a service dog organization, coaching families like hers in fundraising for their working dogs.

# All About Me

If your child is separated from you in a disaster, or you need to explain your child's needs to emergency responders, take this page to provide a snapshot of your child and their needs.

## My Emergency Information

Name:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Diagnosis:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Medication:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian's Names:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Emergency Contact Numbers:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Communication & Behaviors

This is how I communicate:  
\_\_\_\_\_

If I ask for:  
\_\_\_\_\_

This is what I mean:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Behaviors:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

When I am agitated, I might:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## How to Help Keep Me Calm

I don't like:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

To calm myself down, I need:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Some of my favorite things are:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## It might also be helpful for you to know ...

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_