



It includes people with dyslexia, an extreme difficulty in reading, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), an inability to focus on necessary tasks. Also some neurological disorders, such as Tourette's syndrome and persons who have suffered a stroke, are associated with developmental and cognitive disabilities. While many persons with these type 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.

Be sure to use the additional resources listed on the back, including N.O.D.'s general brochure, "Prepare Yourself: Disaster Readiness Tips for People with Disabilities." Identify your resources, make a plan, and create a "ready kit" and a "go kit". **Start today to become better prepared, safer and more secure.**

### Where to find more information

Many of these agencies provide materials in large font, audio or video cassette formats, and different languages.

#### American Red Cross

[www.redcross.org](http://www.redcross.org) • call your local chapter

#### Coordinated Campaign for Learning Disabilities: Project Cope

[www.idonline.org](http://www.idonline.org) • (914) 493-5202 (voice) •  
E-mail: [projectcope@nymc.edu](mailto:projectcope@nymc.edu)

#### Easter Seals (s.a.f.e.t.y. First program)

[www.easter-seals.org](http://www.easter-seals.org) • (800)221-6827 (voice) •  
(312)726-4258 (TTY)

#### Federal Emergency Management Agency

<http://www.fema.gov/preparedness/> • (800)480-2520 (voice)

#### Humane Society of the U.S. (Disaster Center)

[www.hsus.org/hsus\\_field/hsus\\_disaster\\_center/](http://www.hsus.org/hsus_field/hsus_disaster_center/) •  
(202)452-1100 (voice)

#### National Organization on Disability

[www.nod.org/emergency](http://www.nod.org/emergency) • (202)293-5960 (voice)  
• (202)293-5968 (TTY)

#### NOAA Weather Radio

[www.weather.gov/nwer/special\\_needs.htm](http://www.weather.gov/nwer/special_needs.htm)

#### U.S. Department of Homeland Security

[www.ready.gov](http://www.ready.gov) • (800)BE READY (voice) •  
(800)464-6161 (TTY)

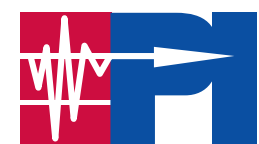
#### U.S. Fire Administration

[www.usfa.fema.gov/safety/atrisk/](http://www.usfa.fema.gov/safety/atrisk/) • (301)447-1000  
(voice)



910 16th Street, N.W. Ste. 600  
Washington, D.C. 20006

NATIONAL ORGANIZATION ON  
DISABILITY



EMERGENCY  
PREPAREDNESS  
INITIATIVE

## Prepare Yourself

*Disaster Readiness Tips  
for People with*

## DEVELOPMENTAL OR COGNITIVE DISABILITIES

[www.nod.org/emergency](http://www.nod.org/emergency)  
910 Sixteenth Street, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20006  
(202) 293-5960 (VOICE)  
(202) 293-5968 (TTY)  
(202) 293-7999 (FAX)

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To be better prepared as a nation, we all must do our part to plan for disasters. Individuals, with or without disabilities, can decrease the impact of a disaster by taking steps to prepare **BEFORE** an event occurs. Results from focus groups conducted by the National Organization on Disability's Emergency Preparedness Initiative (EPI), indicate that people with disabilities need to be more self reliant in emergencies.

**You** are in the best position to know your abilities and needs before, during, and after a disaster. There are many sample planning templates and checklists available to guide you. However, **your plans must fit your own unique circumstances.**

This brochure is designed to help people with developmental and cognitive disabilities begin to plan. The terms "developmental" and "cognitive" include disorders that may impact the person's ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, do math, or follow instructions.

## PREPAREDNESS

### Assessment

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

### Personal Support Network

Create a network of trusted individuals, such as family, friends, co-workers, personal attendants, etc. who can assist you during an emergency. Set up this network at important locations (e.g. home, work, school) making sure you have at least three people at each place.

These individuals should take part in your planning and be familiar with your functional abilities and limitations. Explain to each one why you need their help – “I get so focused on work that I won't hear the fire alarm. Please tell me when it goes off.” Establishing a solid relationship with other people is one

of the most effective means of surviving disaster.

### Make a Plan

Make a plan and keep it simple. Put copies in several places so you can find it easily.

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

People who must use an augmentative communication device (e.g., laptop, word board, or artificial larynx), should try to store inexpensive back-up equipment in the same places they keep their plan. Prepare pre-printed 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 impacted. 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 comprehensive list of items, such as medication, that you will need if you should have to shelter in place, or rely on your own resources for a few days. A Go Bag has fewer items, but they are most essential to take if you must evacuate quickly.

See the N.O.D. guide, “Prepare Yourself: Disaster Readiness Tips for People with Disabilities,” for a list of suggested supplies. The American Red Cross also has a comprehensive checklist of supplies.

Here are a few items of particular interest to people with developmental or cognitive disability:

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

## RESPONSE

In the response phase, you may require immediate rescue or relocation to a shelter – or both. As you read this brochure in a quiet room, it might seem silly to plan for an experience full of tension and fear. But now is just the time. Often, rescue is accompanied by confusion and noise. People may be shouting at you over the roar of engines from cars, boats, or helicopters. Everything said about stress and coping becomes more relevant.

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

**Tip: Focus on the instructions you are given and follow them. If you don't understand, look directly at the rescuer, and ask that he or she repeat. Seconds count, so its important to establish clear communication.**

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 those pre-printed messages aren't available.

## SHELTERING

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 requires extra focus, but your life could be at stake.

### General and “Special Needs” Shelters

You should seek refuge with friends and family first because it will be more comfortable and less stressful. 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. Persons with additional disabilities might have to use the nearest “special needs” shelter, where medical conditions can receive appropriate attention.

If you are going to a shelter, expect that conditions in the shelter (usually a school building or an auditorium) are crowded, noisy, and boring. Shelters are very much the last alternative to other places of refuge. But these facilities, usually run by the American Red Cross chapters or faith-based agencies, can save your life.

### Sheltering Tips

Persons 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 the lack thereof) 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 learning 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.