



AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER & *Hurricane Safety*

*A guide for caregivers and members of the
Autism Community to meet the needs of
individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder*

What Caregivers & Professionals Need to Know About Individuals with ASD

The information included in this guide is meant to supplement your family's existing hurricane plan. The strategies and tips outlined here may support individuals with ASD and may reduce anxiety about the unexpected events that often accompany a hurricane. You as the caregiver will be the constant through all the changes that your family member with ASD is experiencing so encourage your family member to focus on the familiarity of that support.

Prepare Ahead

- Caregivers should create an emergency kit and keep it up to date. The “ASD Hurricane Checklist” details items that may be specifically needed by people with ASD.
- Encourage your family members to participate in the creation of the emergency kit
 - Ask your family member with ASD to add games, toys or non-perishable foods he or she likes to the kit to help ensure that his or her needs are satisfied.
 - Familiarity with the kit may encourage buy-in and decrease anxiety about the unknown.
- Update the kit periodically as interests and tastes change.
- Prepare and practice use of visuals
 - If your family member uses an electronic communication device, you may need a waterproof communication system that requires no electricity or batteries such as a low-tech communication board.

ASD Hurricane Checklist

- Visual Supports
 - Hurricane social narrative, visual schedules, behavior charts, etc.
- Communication Devices
 - With accompanying charger if communication device is electronic
 - Low-tech communication board
- Preferred items
 - Cups, blankets, toys, etc. These may help reduce anxiety.
- Records
 - Most current IEP, evaluations, diagnosis, test scores, Medicaid or other insurance cards, physicians' phone numbers, etc.
- Headphones/ Earplugs (noise canceling or other)
- Medications
- Supports
 - Food, toys, or activities that will help the individual through challenging situations



Preparing for Change

Individuals with ASD can sometimes struggle adapting to change. Even when sheltering in place, there may be changes in routine. In the event of a hurricane, it is important to prepare your loved one with ASD for the following possibilities:

- Presence of sand bags and boards on windows¹
- Change in diet due to inability to access/prepare preferred foods
- Hurricane coverage on the news and lack of access to the television¹ and internet
- Unpredictable or rapidly changing plans
- Change in schedule and event cancelations
- Evacuation
- Loss of electricity¹
- Loss of water¹



Evacuating

Caregivers should evacuate if instructed to do so. ² You can expect this change in plans to be challenging for your loved one with ASD.

- Prepare for traffic!
 - Traffic may be extreme in an evacuation situation. Caregivers should be prepared with entertainment options for the ride and plan to stop frequently for breaks.
- Familiar places such as a friend's or a relative's house are preferred when possible. Planning an evacuation location ahead of time can help you to prepare materials and your loved one with ASD.
 - Social experience stories about the place you are evacuating to or pictures of the location can help prepare your loved one with ASD.
 - Remember that individuals with ASD may not know exactly what it means to evacuate and may feel anxiety about leaving their home.





Going to a Mass Care Hurricane Shelter

- Pre-Registration is required for Special Needs Shelters. You can contact your local Emergency Management Center for the forms and process or complete the Special Needs Shelter Program (SpNS) Intake Form on the Florida Health Website. There you will find forms, guides, and rules for the SpNS Program.³
- If you have a service animal, you can bring that animal to a shelter that would otherwise not allow pets. You should have their vaccination and license records with you to show the shelter staff if asked.³
- Be aware of your child's sensory needs. Mass care shelters can involve living in a confined space for an extended period with many other strangers. You should prepare your loved one with ASD for potentially unpleasant sounds and smells.³
- Mass care shelters will provide food, water and basic sanitary facilities but you should also bring your hurricane supply kit with you to the mass care hurricane shelter.³

After the Storm

Transitioning back to your typical routine after a hurricane can be challenging.

- Damage may cause familiar areas to appear different.
- Routines may take a while to resume due to damage or persisting lack of power or water

Individuals with ASD are often attracted to water. Avoid wading in or playing in flood water after a storm.

- Flood water may contain dangerous debris.²
- The water may also contain electrically charged downed power lines.¹

Additional Resources

Visit the Safety page of our website for up-to-date resources on hurricane safety, including information on strategies, social experience stories, and strategies for professionals.

<http://card-usf.fmhi.usf.edu/resources/materials/safety.html>

[https://www.ready.gov/hurricanes-](https://www.ready.gov/hurricanes)
The Official website of the Department of Homeland Security

CARD-USF staff is available to provide technical assistance and training to disaster management

professionals (e.g. shelter personnel and first responders). CARD-USF also can provide consultation and resources to caregivers of individuals with ASD.

Sources

1. Official website of the Department of Homeland Security. (n.d.). *Hurricanes*. Retrieved from <https://www.ready.gov/hurricanes>
2. Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). (2018). *Be Prepared for a Hurricane*. Retrieved from <https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1527015736946-1f1f8b5f3989072327dd54d5007c06cf/HurricaneV2.pdf>
3. Official website of the Department of Homeland Security. (n.d.). *Shelter*. Retrieved from <https://www.ready.gov/shelter>



Florida's First Choice for Autism Support

The Center for Autism & Related Disabilities (CARD) provides support and assistance with the goal of optimizing the potential of people with autism spectrum disorder and related disabilities.

card-usf.fmhi.usf.edu



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