

# THE FAMILY EMERGENCY “TOOLBOX”

*Recommendations for your family's disaster preparedness including what to include in your "ready to go" kit! (This information includes specific ideas for the "toolbox" for children/ adults on the Autism Spectrum.)*

Below are suggestions for you to consider when preparing for an emergency or disaster. These are the things that you may need for you (and your family/ friends) in the event of an evacuation or sheltering in place.

Please remember that during an emergency we need to consider for our family these three important factors: 1) *Safety* 2) *Basic Needs* 3) *Comfort*

**Let's get started constructing a basic toolbox for your family.**

Your entire family should be part of the process of assembling this toolbox. By actively engaging each member - they will garner a better understanding of what is included in the emergency toolbox and also be better prepared in the event of a situation where you would need to evacuate or shelter in place.

## PRIORITY LIST

**ABSOLUTE MUSTS: VERY IMPORTANT to make copies of the information on these documents and to bring the actual ones if you have time:**

**Passport, driver's license, birth certificates, car registration, medical directives, and insurance cards.**

**Also be sure to pack in advance: medications, and a video or photos of the contents of your home and car.**

**If able bring your COMPUTER, TABLET, PHONE, CHARGERS/ BATTERIES, and EARBUDS/HEADSET.**

## IMPORTANT TO CONSIDER

## **NECESSARY ITEMS TO HAVE READY for an EVACUATION or TO SHELTER in PLACE**

- 1) Preferably a backpack, container box, or small piece of luggage to store all your NECESSARY items. Each family member can have their own backpack.
- 2) A flashlight for each family member over the age of 3. A flashlight that can regenerate by “cranking” is also good when you don’t have enough batteries and you lose power.
- 3) Sleeping bags, blankets, towels, masks, hand sanitizer, toilet paper, diaper wipes, and a trash bag to transport quickly the larger items.
- 4) Items that are “must haves” for each individual - such as foods, drinks, clothing, stuffed animals, toys, electronics, fidget spinners, etc. that your family members on the spectrum **must have** to minimize disruption to their routine and to give them comfort if they are evacuated to strange surroundings- such as a shelter.
- 5) Photos of each family member that is printed and not only on your phone (in case your phone battery drains). This way if your family member is lost or has left the area (elopement) - you have a printed copy of a picture of them.
- 6) A printed emergency contact list with phone numbers, addresses, and emails.
- 7) An ID bracelet or some form of wearable identification for each child in your group or family member with special needs. (See below information from FOUNDME.com, one of the sponsors of the World Autism Summit.)
- 8) Any communication device that is used with your family members who rely on this for their language system.
- 9) Spare personal hygiene products including toothbrushes, favorite toothpaste, soaps, deodorant, diapers, pull-ups, women’s personal products, bandaids, anti-itch cream, antibiotic ointment, sunblock, and spare shoelaces in the event of broken ones.
- 10) Water for each person for 3-7 days. Best to have gallon jugs ready to go with spare cups or thermos.
- 11) Lighter or matches in case you need to start a fire for warmth. Please keep away from children or those who should not be using a lighter or matches.
- 12) A notebook and writing utensils to document important phone numbers, names, resources, etc.

13) Food, leash, and a place for your animal to stay (such as a travel kennel).

## MORE SUGGESTIONS

- 1) To help reduce auditory stimuli - noise-canceling headphones, music and earbuds or earphones, white noise machine, or hoodie sweatshirt.
- 2) To reduce visual stimuli- sunglasses, hoodie sweatshirts, big brim hats, or baseball caps.
- 3) Pack in your toolbox utensils, favorite cups, plates, foods, and snacks.
- 4) To help reduce olfactory (smell) overload- have preferred soaps, foods, and drinks that have a smell that is acceptable to the family member who has sensory issues.
- 5) Games, puzzles, fidget toys, small cars or trains, decks of cards, balls, favorite toys, and a slinky (rhythmic and can help ease nervousness).

## ACTION ITEMS

Have you put together your must-have list? This includes video-taping the contents of your home. (Even your favorite photo albums)

Have you contacted your local emergency responders (e.g. firehouse) to alert them that a family member with unique needs (e.g. nonverbal/ low verbal/ severe Autism, etc. ) is residing in your home? Consider asking them if they can allow for a visit so that the equipment and vehicles are less “scary” and become more familiar.

Have you discussed with the your child's school about their emergency plans for evacuation and shelter in place with students who have unique challenges?

Have you practiced an evacuation and sheltering in place? Discuss with your children different scenarios (such as an impending hurricane) and practice gathering your “to-go” items and driving away. You may need to practice several times to increase familiarity and comfort level. Also, explain the difference (visually, orally, etc. ) between “practicing” and “real”. It may be necessary to create some signage that gives a clear visual signal when the family is practicing and when danger is imminent.

Does your child know their address, a safe person to go to in the event that you are not able to help them, and how to dial 911 (or the emergency number in your area)?

Establish a CODE WORD for your child to know that a person helping them is SAFE - such as a neighbor or trusted friend. Remind them to ONLY go with a person if they tell your child the CODE WORD (or phrase). Practice this scenario and enlist school providers, such as speech and language therapists to incorporate matters of safety into their lessons.