



EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS IN THE COMMUNITY

Plan/Prepare

- Account for how the individual learns best (visual, verbal, etc.)
- Teach the individual to identify safety personnel and what they do
 - Set up visits with safety personnel in their uniforms to build comfort of the individual around a uniformed First Responder
- Make sure the individual knows personal information, who to call for help in a dangerous or scary situation, how to identify and behave around strangers, and how to place an emergency call
 - If unable to communicate these things or if the individual has decreased communication in situations on stress/distress or due to a medical emergency, ensure that the individual has a form of identification (pocket or wearable) and emergency contact information on them at all times
- Teach the individual to identify body parts/pain
- Using their mode of communication, teach the individual how to properly interact with First Responders in case of an emergency
 - Teach the individual the meanings of and how to use the communication symbols on the emergency prep picture communication visuals if any communication aids will be needed
 - In an emergency situation, if an individual is unable to effectively communicate and understand the symbols, then it will not help the individual or the person aiding them
- Discuss what types of emergencies are mostly likely to happen in your area- discuss what to do in each case
- Learn about your community's warning signals- what they sound like, what you should do when you hear them
- Use social stories to prepare the individual for the possibility of different emergencies that can occur in the community
 - Include how to locate a safe part of the building
 - Include that they may have to stay in the building longer than anticipated
 - Include coping mechanisms that they can implement when they get anxious (i.e. deep breathing, counting to 10, play or create a game about something they enjoy- iSpy, naming all of the trains in Thomas and Friends, flashlight game/shadow puppets, etc.)
 - Include possibly increased noise from the weather and people as well as possibly increased movement of others around them
 - Include directions when outside and when to seek shelter
 - Create social story for cases of evacuation
- Teach noise reducing techniques (i.e. plug ears) if the individual becomes distressed by the noise
- Model the correct response, rehearse the correct response in both pretend and more naturalistic environments, and deliver feedback
- Practice the plan



- Do a trial run of evacuation procedures to work out the quirks
- Practice regularly
- Find teachable moments throughout the day to reinforce the information you are teaching
 - i.e., if you are in a store, ask where the tornado safe location is
- Always have a backup plan for when things do not go as you envisioned them

During an Emergency

- Carry laminated **communication display(s)** with you at all times, even if a communication device is used
 - Backup in case of device battery dying
- If bad weather is anticipated that day:
 - Go over social story/coach about bad weather and what to do in the event of bad weather or an emergency before leaving the home
 - Bring a calming item or activity with you for the individual
 - Make sure communication device is fully charged before leaving the home
 - Make sure electronics that may help calm or preoccupy the individual are fully charged before leaving the home
- Use a calm tone and, if possible, lower voice volume than theirs when instructing the individual during the emergency
- Help create a “safe space” in the environment if possible
 - Use blankets, pillows, towels, clothing, stuffed animals to create a soft and comforting space
 - Provide fidget item for the individual
 - Provide deep pressure to palms of each hand
 - Play music if this is calming to the individual
 - Increase music volume to mute storm noise if possible
 - If the power goes out, find flashlights or use your phone flashlight to allow the individual to see around them (can also create a game with the flashlights)
- If driving, inform them that you are looking for a safe location to stop the car
 - Once in a safe location, inform the individual that you are in a safe place now, that you OK, and that they too are OK
 - If the noise is loud, talk about other things that are also loud (i.e. trains, drums, etc.)
- Keep the individual informed about what is going on
- As stress escalates the ability to process verbal information declines
 - Picture-based instructions can be highly useful during emergency situations.

Special thanks to Laura Golden, OTR, OTD and IDD Council Member for her preparation of this document.