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# Are You Ready?

*Disaster Preparedness for Families of Children with Disabilities*

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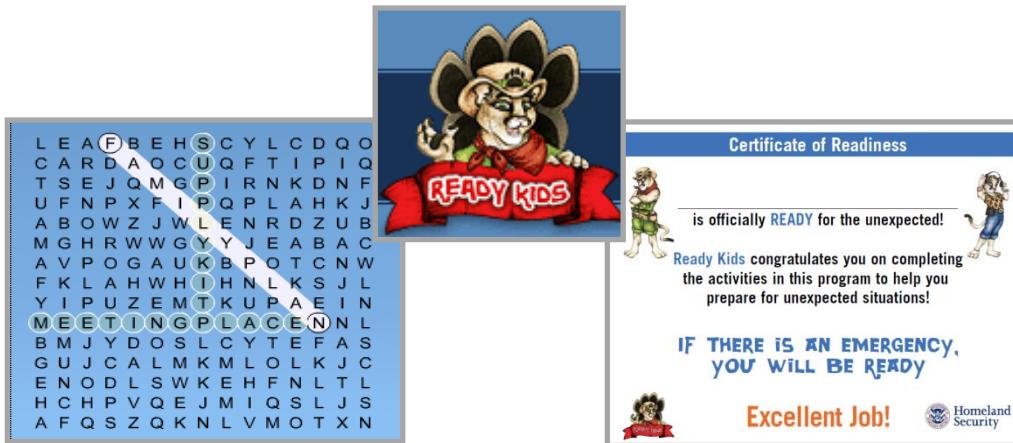
## *Disaster Preparedness for Families of Children with Disabilities*

The United States Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Ready America Program says that being prepared for an emergency is a three-step process: Get a Kit, Make a Plan, Be Informed. But how does that work for families of children with disabilities or special health care needs? How can you sort through all of the preparedness information that is available to prepare for your family today?

Let's break it down, one step at a time. For each step, you will see some tasks you can do, and then a section with links to other websites that can help you prepare. This document is designed to take you quickly through the three steps to preparedness (Get a Kit, Make a Plan, Be Informed) and to give you access to other helpful resources if you need more information. Think of these steps as a cycle; each step changes the other steps a little bit, and you will need to revisit each of them as your family grows and changes. But you can start preparing your family right now. We will work through the steps one by one, and in a short amount of time you will help your family be better prepared for an emergency.

As much as you can, make emergency preparedness a family affair. [Ready Kids](#) offers games, activities, and other ideas to get the whole family involved. Children are encouraged to do what they can to prepare, and can even test their knowledge and earn

a certificate of readiness. Make it fun for the whole family, and the whole family will be more ready if an emergency does happen.



Before you get started, take the time to think about your child with a disability or special health care needs. Think about and write down what your child can do for her/himself, what s/he will need assistance to do, and how those things may change in time of disaster, when you may not be in familiar surroundings or may not have access to all the people and things you usually have around you. If you are separated from your child during a disaster, this would give a new helper (first responder, Red Cross volunteer, or others) an idea of what your child can and cannot do and how your child might be helped through a new and difficult situation. Some websites offer a formal *Personal Assessment*. You can click on these Red Cross and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) links to see their personal assessment tools. Topics include personal care assistance, eating and feeding, electricity-dependent equipment, mobility and transportation, other supplies, support network, and service animals.

<http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/beprepared/assess.html>

<http://www.fema.gov/library/viewRecord.do?id=1442> (follow links to pdf or txt document)

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Let's get started now with our three step process to preparedness – Get a Kit, Make a Plan, Be Informed. Congratulations on beginning the process of family emergency preparedness. What you are doing is very important; preparedness saves lives.

## Get a Kit

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*Your disaster kit should contain the things you need to either shelter in place (stay where you are) or to evacuate. You need enough supplies in your kit to last at least three days.*

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### *Steps to Take to Prepare a Kit:*

Start with the basics. Use the list from DHS [Ready America](#) on what to have in your kit to get started. Then think about your child's specific needs.

Pack in your kit medication, assistive devices, medical equipment, mobility aids, communication aids, comfort items, and anything else that is used on a regular basis to provide care, assistance, or comfort to your child. “If we were stranded on a desert island, I’d need to have \_\_\_\_\_”.

For things that are too big to fit in a kit or things you use regularly and cannot keep packed, describe them in a detailed list and put the list in the kit. Consider also developing a labeling system, like red stickers with your child’s initials on all the things you hope to take with you in an emergency. Put a note on the outside of your kit that says something like, “Necessary equipment is all labeled with red stickers and the initials \_\_\_\_”. Try to keep these items close together in your home as much as possible, so that they are easy for first responders to identify

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and grab. Remember that this does not guarantee that your equipment will come with you, but it certainly makes it easier for that to happen.

- ✓ For things that require a power source, have a back up power source in your kit if you can (like batteries for something you normally plug in or an extra battery for a power chair).
  
- ✓ Pack in your kit the information you would want to have with you during or after a disaster. Include health insurance information as well as your Medicaid or Social Security eligibility determination letter (if applicable). Ask your doctor for duplicate prescriptions for medication or equipment to put in your kit (the doctor may be able to specify “in case of emergency” on the prescription). Also pack an information sheet about your child; if you are separated, describe some basics you would want a new helper to know about your child. Finally, pack a contact list; you will want to have the numbers of doctors, clinics, support staff, family members, and others who you might need to contact during or after the emergency. Consider also having copies of electronic (computer) documents on a flash drive, packed in a waterproof container in your kit.
  
- ✓ If your child has a service animal, pack in your kit food, water, veterinary records, medication, and an extra cape or harness for the service animal.
  
- ✓ Pack in your kit a printed copy of your family’s emergency plan (we’ll work on the plan next).

*Useful Links on Preparing a Kit:*

To get the recommended contents of a kit from DHS Ready America:

<http://www.ready.gov/america/getakit/index.html>

To see what additional kit items DHS Ready America recommends for people with disabilities: <http://www.ready.gov/america/getakit/disabled.html>

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## Make a Plan

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*Your plan should describe what you would do in an emergency – where you will go if you need to evacuate, how you will obtain the assistance you might need, and how your family will find you.*

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### *Steps to Take to Make Your Plan:*

- ✓ Visit DHS Ready America's site on making a plan to download the Family Emergency Plan. Fill in the information, writing down names and school/work information about all family members in the household. Fill out the small wallet-sized cards for family members to carry with them; if an emergency happens while the family is not together, you will want everyone in the family to know where to find each other and who to call if they cannot reach you. Print these and other helpful planning tools now, while you have access to the computer and electricity.
- ✓ Identify how your plan will be different if you are at work, if your child is at school, or if you are away from home. Identify the disasters that affect your community and know how your plan will change in those different situations. For example, for some disasters you may need to shelter in place (stay where you are), but other disasters will require you to evacuate.
- ✓ Identify who can help your family in a time of emergency, from family members and friends to clinics, doctors, medical equipment suppliers, personal assistants, and others who know your family and may be able to offer information, resources, or assistance.

- ✓ Tell everyone in the home where the family's Disaster Kit is and make sure that everyone knows to take it with them if they evacuate with your child.
- ✓ Identify a contact person who lives in a different state or a different part of the state. In some emergencies, it will be easier to call someone far away than someone in the neighborhood. Make sure your family members know who the contact person is and how to reach her/him.
- ✓ Identify where you will evacuate to: some place close if you need to leave your home; a place outside your town if the disaster affects your town or neighborhood; and a place even farther away in case of a regional disaster. Make sure your family members know where to go.
- ✓ Learn how to shut off the utilities (gas, power, water) to your home and teach others who are able to do so. Teach everyone in the home what to do if the smoke alarm or other alarms sound.
- ✓ Plan for evacuation by keeping your car's gas tank at least half full, keeping some cash on hand, and knowing how to access specialized transportation if your child needs it.
- ✓ Use a tool like the *Good to Go Kit*, the *Disability Specific Disaster Preparedness Inventory*, and the *Vial of Life* to help you record information and plan for your family's needs.

#### *Useful Links for Making Your Plan:*

To see the DHS Ready America information on making a plan and download the Family Emergency Plan (pdf pictured below):

<http://www.ready.gov/america/makeaplan/index.html>

To see what the American Red Cross recommends for people with disabilities making a plan: <http://www.prepare.org/disabilities/disabilitiesprep.htm>

To see what FEMA recommends for people with disabilities making a plan: <http://www.fema.gov/library/viewRecord.do?id=1442> (follow links to pdf or txt document)

To access the Good to Go Kit on evacuation for people with disabilities:

<http://tcds.edb.utexas.edu/documents/GoodtoGoLists.pdf>

To access the Disability Specific Disaster Preparedness Inventory:

<http://www.uconnucedd.org/pdfs/Disability%20Specific%20Disaster%20Preparedness%20Inventory.pdf>

To access the Vial of Life: [https://www.vialoflife.com/vial\\_form.php](https://www.vialoflife.com/vial_form.php)

The image shows a 'Family Emergency Plan' form from Ready.org. It features a grid of four cards, each labeled 'Family Emergency Plan' with a checkmark. The cards are arranged in a 2x2 grid. Each card has a 'Find' button at the top. The form includes sections for 'Family Contact Name', 'Phone Number', 'Work Locations', 'School Locations', 'Other Places', and 'Important Medical Information'. At the bottom, it says 'Dial 911 for Emergencies'.

## Be Informed

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*Know what to expect and where to turn for information.*

*Communicate with local officials and first responders about your family's needs in an emergency. Ask "what if" questions of your providers to learn about available resources. Learn about what advocates in the disability community and national leaders in emergency management are doing to assist families like yours to prepare for and recover from disasters.*

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### *Steps to Take to Be Informed:*

- ✓ Contact your local emergency manager. This is the person in your city, town, or county in charge of the community emergency plan. This person can help you understand what services will be available for people with disabilities in an emergency, and you can help this person understand who people with disabilities in your community are and what they need. There may be a formal registry for individuals who need assistance in a disaster, or you may just need to have a conversation about who your family is and what kind of supports you might need. You can find your emergency manager through your local government or through the [Virginia Department of Emergency Management](#) (VDEM).
- ✓ Contact the local police department and fire station. If possible, plan a visit for you and your child, or attend a public event at the station. It is usually helpful to talk with first responders about your family before an emergency occurs.
- ✓ Share information with your emergency manager and first responders that may be helpful for your community about disabilities, like [Tips for First Responders](#).

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- ✓ If your child needs electricity-dependent equipment, register with your power company. If you are a Dominion customer, you can fill out their [Medical Equipment Notification Form](#). You will need to fill this out, get a physician's signature, and submit it every year to remain on their list.
- ✓ Know which local radio stations broadcast emergency alerts for the Virginia Emergency Alert System. You can find this information through the [Virginia Department of Emergency Management](#) (VDEM).
- ✓ Ask your case manager, social worker, doctor or nurse, or other professionals you interact with if they have any recommendations for you on what to do during a disaster. They may be able to help you get copies of the paperwork you should have in your kit about the services your child receives. Your child's doctor's office staff may be able to give you copies of medical records or prescriptions or refer you to programs that can help you get extra medicine or equipment for your disaster kit. Be informed about their emergency policies and plans so that you know what you can expect from them during or after an emergency.
- ✓ Ask your durable medical equipment company and other service providers what they recommend for the equipment and supplies you need in case of an emergency. The DME supply company may know of ways to get a generator at a free or reduced cost for your electricity-dependent equipment or help you get extra supplies for your kit. Know before an emergency occurs what could happen with your child's equipment and how you can keep it working as long as possible.
- ✓ Learn what disability organizations, FEMA, and the Red Cross are doing in your area and across the country about emergency preparedness, and find out how you can help by sharing what you know about disabilities and special needs.

*Useful Links on Being Informed:*

To find your local emergency manager's name and email address:

<http://www.vaemergency.com/library/directories/emmaildir.cfm>

To learn about the types of disasters that impact Virginia:

<http://www.vaemergency.com/threats/index.cfm>

To learn which radio stations broadcast emergency alerts:

<http://www.vaemergency.com/prepare/eas/index.cfm>

To see Tips for First Responders: <http://cdd.unm.edu/products/tips3rdedition.pdf>

To learn about the National Organization on Disability's Emergency Preparedness Initiative: <http://www.nod.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.ViewPage&PageID=1564>

To view the comprehensive FEMA guide to personal emergency preparedness:

<http://www.fema.gov/areyouready/index.shtm>



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There are lots of resources available on emergency preparedness for people with disabilities. With so much information available, it can be difficult to know where to start, and you may feel overwhelmed and discouraged. To make preparedness more manageable for you and your family, a limited number of reliable and inclusive resources have been included in this guide to help you get started with emergency planning for your family. We have taken the three basic steps to preparedness - Get a Kit, Make a Plan, & Be Informed - and combined them with several years of experience working with people with disabilities to and families to develop this guide to preparedness for families of children with disabilities or special health care needs. For many, the checklists and the resources in this guide will be enough to develop a comprehensive plan, but others may need to explore the included links and beyond to find additional resources specific to the needs of their families. Although it may be frightening to think about emergencies and worst-case scenarios, you can use this guide to move quickly toward the important goal of family emergency preparedness. Remember that preparedness saves lives. Take the first step and start preparing your family today; you can do it!

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*A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. –Lao Tzu*

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