



Hurricane Sandy

Help for Families of Children with Special Needs

Safety Concerns

This is a time when safety is a priority. Children with special needs may not understand the dangers related to a disaster. Discuss only those safety issues that affect them, in simple, understandable words, using real pictures if possible. Set understandable rules and boundaries and repeat them often. If possible, ask them to explain the dangers and safety measures back to you. Always be honest and try to remain calm, assuring them that you will work together to stay safe.

If you and your family have had to relocate, try to maintain as much of a routine as possible such as keeping to a similar mealtime, play and sleep schedule and having familiar things if possible. If your child's favorite possessions are unavailable, see if similar ones are available (for example, a favorite book or video).

Medical Supplies and Transportation

Notify your local emergency responders or police department if you have specific medical supply or transportation needs related to your child with a disability. This support may include lift-equipped vehicles, transportation of a child with oxygen, etc.

Medication

If you can't access prescription medications, attempt to directly contact your pharmacy or doctor for a refill. Medicaid recipients can contact their HMO who may have alternate pharmacies to refill the prescription. Individuals who have medications manufactured by Pfizer can contact the Pfizer Connection to Care program at 1-866-706-2400 for assistance. If you are at a Red Cross Shelter, please notify a shelter representative if you have medication issues, particularly if the medicine requires refrigeration.

Emotional Support

Children with special needs may be confused by all the disruption often associated with a big storm. Children with language and learning difficulties may be particularly vulnerable to misconceptions and may exhibit regressed behavior and have difficulty expressing concerns and confusion. Try to establish as normal a routine as possible. Positive distractions such as playing games, visiting others, listening to music or reading may help. Reduce exposure to television and newspaper coverage of the disaster as it may confuse children by thinking that the storm is happening all over again. Provide opportunities for your child to express concerns such as by talking, drawing or play. Correct any apparent misconceptions (for example, related to cause of the storm). To limit negative behaviors, attempt to offer desirable leisure activities and reinforce appropriate behaviors.

It is natural to be stressed, angry, tired, and worried during and after a disaster. Recognize that it is not appropriate to take your anger out on another person. You and your family may require assistance to cope with new surroundings and to minimize confusion. To get help, approach community supports you can turn to in time of need, including extended family, religious groups, local organizations, and recreational activities to relieve stress and to connect with others around you. Don't be afraid to ask for and receive help. If a friend or family member offers help, not only are they concerned for you, but it helps them feel good, too. So, give them an opportunity to feel good and get out of the cold at the same time. Along with family members, find ways to take care of yourself and to express your emotions in a safe way such as through rest, exercise, music, art, writing, etc.

Helpful Disaster-related Resources for Families with Special Needs

- **2-1-1 Disaster Response**

Call 211 if you need information on local resources in your community. You can also find information at <http://www.nj211.org/hurricane.cfm> 24 hours a day, seven days a week if you need help in understanding and finding available assistance services in your area. Language translation and TTY services are offered to any caller. You can also search the database of services in your local community or speak live with an experienced community resource specialist. 2-1-1 will help identify with you the best local resources to fit your individual needs including open pharmacies, grocery stores, gasoline stations, etc.

- **American Red Cross**

Response vehicles are feeding people at mobile and fixed locations. Communicate your special needs so that they can assist you most appropriately. To find Red Cross disaster related services and supports near you, call 1-800-733-2767 or visit <http://newsroom.redcross.org/>. The Red Cross established a method to let family and friends know that you are safe and well: <https://safeandwell.communityos.org/cms/index.php>

- **AutismCares - Autism Response Team**

This organization provides support for families affected by natural disasters. Call the Autism Response Team at 1-888-Autism2 (288-4762). Español 888-772-9050. Or e-mail at AutismCares@autismspeaks.org

- **Disaster Mental Health Helpline**

Stress, anxiety, and depression are common reactions after a disaster. Anyone, including parents and caregivers of children with special needs, who feels overwhelmed as a result of the storm can call 1-877-294-4357 to speak with a trained counselor. A TTY line is available for the deaf and hearing impaired at 1-877-294-4356.

The federal government also has a Disaster Distress website disasterdistress.samhsa.gov/ and helpline that provides crisis counseling and support at 1-800-985-5990.

- **FEMA Office of Disability Integration & Coordination**

This office coordinates emergency recovery for children and adults with disability. The general FEMA number to call for assistance is 800-621-6632. If a family that has a child with special needs in New York or New Jersey is in dire need of help, contact Jim Flemming, the Regional Disability Integration Specialist at James.flemming@dhs.gov

- **Mom2Mom Helpline**

Parents of children with special needs can call 1-877-914-6662 for encouragement, support, and guidance.

- **Sesame Workshop: Hurricane Kit**

Hurricanes, storms, and other natural disasters can be difficult for young children who may not fully understand what's going on around them. These tips, activities, and videos can help them feel safe, cope with emotions, and understand that there is hope for the future.

<http://www.sesamestreet.org/parents/topicsandactivities/toolkits/hurricane>

- **Special Child Health Services Case Management Units (SCHS)**

This office assists families of children with disabilities with their medical, educational, developmental, social and economic needs. If you have a child with special healthcare needs and want to find out if your county SCHS Case Management Unit is open and functioning, call the NJ Department of Health at 609-777-7778.

- **The Great Storm and Flood Recovery Children's Story & Activity Book**

You can use this book and the information in the parent guide to support you and your child as you recover from the problems related to the storm and flooding.

English: <http://www.mentorresearch.org/Documents/StormFloodColoringBookParentGuide.pdf>

Spanish: <http://www.mentorresearch.org/Documents/SpanishFlood%20StormRecoveryParenting.pdf>