

*Disaster Preparedness: The impact of hurricanes, tornadoes, acts of terrorism, and floods are all clear in the minds of everyone today. But, even though we all know what CAN happen, are we prepared? Can we protect ourselves and those we love? Would we know what to do?*

# **Disaster Preparedness for Persons with Mental Health Needs**



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*Disaster can strike quickly and without warning. It can force you to evacuate your neighborhood or confine you to your home. It can destroy one street and leave the next untouched. Where will you be when disaster strikes? How will you find your family or others you love? What would you do if basic services – water, gas, electricity or telephones – were cut off? Local officials and relief workers will be on the scene after a disaster, but they cannot reach everyone right away. If you have mental health needs, planning can be more complicated.*

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Planning how you will respond ahead of time is critical, and will require extra attention to details and needs that other individuals may not have to worry about. You will need to plan for changes in the environment, manage medication, respond to emotional and behavioral crises, make hard evacuation decisions, and notify service providers, to name just a few of the issues to consider.

Individuals and families cope with disaster by preparing in advance and working together as a team with their surrounding community of support. Being prepared is your best protection and your responsibility. This whitepaper offers ideas and resources to assist you in being prepared and ready!

### **Types of Disasters**

Communities can face a variety of natural and manmade disasters. **Natural disasters** include hurricanes, fires, floods, tornados, epidemic diseases, and other weather related problems. **Manmade disasters** are the result of terrorism, intentional or unintentional explosions, or bio terrorism.

Natural disasters are not new to us. The nation has experienced major hurricanes, tornados, floods, and wild fires multiple times over the last few years. Each natural disaster has killed, injured, displaced, and/or caused property damage to thousands.

When discussing disaster preparation, we generally think about hurricanes, floods, or tornados. There are also many additional types of natural disasters, including fires during the dry months, floods from heavy rains, damage from coastal storms, tornados and high winds, and fog that causes extended periods of limited visibility. Communities must also be prepared for disease epidemics that could hit, causing limited access to health care and forcing strict sanitation and prevention practices or extended stays within a home or a community because of quarantine.

In thinking about man-made disasters, we cannot escape the vision of September 11, 2001 and continued threats of terrorism. Nonetheless terrorism can come in many forms, such as bombs, disease, or attack, and man-made disasters can range beyond terrorism, to include industrial accidents, chemical spills and other similar events.

It is essential that you understand how to put a disaster plan into action in a variety of situations that would include both natural disasters and manmade emergencies. When planning for a disaster, you will need to think about potential situations and make sure you can adapt the plan to meet your unique needs no matter what the cause.



## SECTION ONE: Thinking Ahead

The time to prepare for a disaster is BEFORE it happens. Use this checklist to assist you in making sure that you have done everything possible to prepare for a disaster and prevent serious outcomes, should one hit your community.

### Your Mental Health Needs

- ✓ Do you have a current care plan and list of medications from your physician?
- ✓ Do you have a completed emergency information form?
- ✓ Do you have a two week supply of medications and supplies?
- ✓ Do you have backup systems or plans for medical equipment that require electricity?
- ✓ Have you discussed the best place to be in the event of a disaster with your doctor?
- ✓ Is your local emergency management team and neighbors aware that you have mental health care needs and are they familiar with those needs?
- ✓ Do you have a disaster plan for while you are at school, work, church or any other public place?

### Your Family and Those You Love

- ✓ Do you have a disaster plan? Have you practiced the plan? Do you have a disaster supply kit?
- ✓ Have you designated and shared with friends and family a “meeting” place and central point of contact should you become separated during a disaster?
- ✓ Have you considered the impact of common disasters on you, your home, and your community?
- ✓ Have you become comfortable with pictures of emergency workers common to disaster scenes (such as workers in uniform, in fire suits, and workers wearing protective face gear) so you are able to recognize them when they come to assist your community?
- ✓ Have you made plans for your pets?

### Your Home

- Have you checked your home for materials and items that might pose a hazard during a disaster? (Don't forget the outside!)
- Have you located and learned how to turn on and off utilities such as gas and electricity?
- Do you have working smoke and carbon monoxide detectors in your home?
- Does your home have necessary resources such as a water hose, fire extinguishers, generators, etc.?
- Have you developed a plan with your neighbors on how you will assist one another in case of a disaster?



## SECTION TWO: Disaster Planning & Preparation

Planning is critical in keeping safe. Planning and preparation are essential in helping you meet your needs and minimize the chaos and anxiety that often occur with a disaster. One of the best ways to prepare for a disaster is to create a “team” that will help you plan for your safety and assist you in the recovery process. The team can be made up of family members, significant others, professionals and providers, neighbors, or anyone important in your life.

### Planning and Preparation

- Meet with your team and talk over why you need to prepare for disaster. Discuss the impact of disasters on your home and community and explore how your mental health needs may require extra planning.
- Pick two places to meet in the event you are separated from your family or significant others. You might pick outside your home in case of a sudden emergency such as a fire. Or if you can't return home, you would pick someplace outside of your neighborhood. Everyone must know the address of the “meeting place” and how to contact one another.
- Ask an out-of-state friend to be your "outside contact" since after a disaster it's often easier to call long distance than to make local calls. You will call this number and leave messages on how you are and where you will be staying. Your family, support team, or others can call this contact to find out where you are and if you are ok. Your entire team should know your contact's phone number.
- Discuss with others and neighbors what to do in an evacuation. Plan ahead on how to take care of your pets.
- Post emergency telephone numbers by phones (fire, police, ambulance, hospital, doctor, poison control, etc.).
- Teach everyone in your home how and when to call 9-1-1 or your local Emergency Medical Services number for emergency help.
- Show each adult person how and when to turn off the water, gas, and electricity at the main switches.
- Decide the best evacuation routes from your home.
- Invest in a weather and disaster radio that can be battery powered so you can monitor ongoing disaster situations and respond appropriately.
- Put together a disaster supply kit for your home, for evacuation, for your car, and possibly for work.





The CAFÉ TA Center is a program of The Family Café, a cross-disability organization that has been connecting individuals with information, training and resources for more than twelve years. The Center is supported by SAMHSA to operate one of its five national technical assistance centers; providing technical assistance, training, and resources that facilitate the restructuring of the mental health system through effective consumer directed approaches for adults with

serious mental illnesses across the country. The project utilizes a peer-driven approach that is founded upon strategies and interventions consistent with self-determination and recovery models and guided by expert consultants and national technical assistance professionals. The CAFÉ TA Center target areas includes workforce development, supported education, and the dissemination of resources and training that will ensure consumer leaders contribute to the system's capacity to make adjustments at every level to ensure a responsive system of care.

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