



How to Respond to Victims with Autism in a Disaster



Quick Facts for Search & Rescue or Fire Situations

Try to understand the degree of Autism you are dealing with from a family member

Individuals cannot be identified as Autistic by appearance; look for behaviors

Do not expect an Autistic person to respond if you call their name, you must make visual contact with them

Water is a strong point of attraction; immediately search pools, ponds, lakes, and rivers

Someone with Autism may not experience fear; do not discount searching a location because a reasonable person would not go there

Autistic people may not feel cold, heat, or pain in a typical manner

They may not acknowledge pain, or have an unusual response to it including laughter, loud noises, singing, or sudden, impulsive movements

The person may seem oblivious to what is happening around them, or appear to be in their own world

Speak in short, clear phrases, such as "Sit down.", "Wait here.", or "Come with me."

An individual with Autism will take longer to respond to directives and not process or comprehend urgency, even in a life-threatening situation

They will insist on doing things according to their normal routine, despite being told otherwise (may stop to zipper a coat and not accept that it can be done later or while they're being moved). This will be especially prevalent during an emergency situation, where they will try to comfort themselves with rituals and order

If restraint is necessary, be aware that they may have a poorly developed trunk area; **positional asphyxiation could occur**

Adults are just as likely to hide in a fire or disaster as children

Autistic individuals are a high risk after rescue, someone must be assigned to keep an eye on them at all times

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