



How to Respond to Victims with Autism in a Disaster

What is Autism?

Autism is a disorder of neural development that is characterized by impaired social interaction and communication, and by restricted and repetitive behavior.

An Autistic person may also have medical issues, lack of coordination and muscle tone, and various levels of sensory perception or integration dysfunction. Imagine not knowing where your body ends and space begins, or having no idea whether or not you are sitting straight or falling out of your chair. Often they cannot process more than one physical sense at a time, if at all (noise, sight, touch, smell).

Most often, a person with an Autism Spectrum Disorder looks just like you or me. Also keep in mind that each person on the spectrum may exhibit completely different physical or behavioral symptoms, which may include:

Difficulty understanding language or gestures

Inability to follow multiple commands

Limited or no speech, or repetitive phrases only

Avoids eye contact

Spinning, rocking, flapping arms, hitting self, biting self

Hyper or hypo sensitivity to light, sound, smell, touch, or taste

Abnormal fears or lack of fear in a dangerous situation

Absence of cause-and-effect connections, needs reminders

Takes everything literally, no understanding of sarcasm or exaggeration

Repeats words but doesn't understand them

