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Researched, Written and Prepared  
for  
The People of the State of New York

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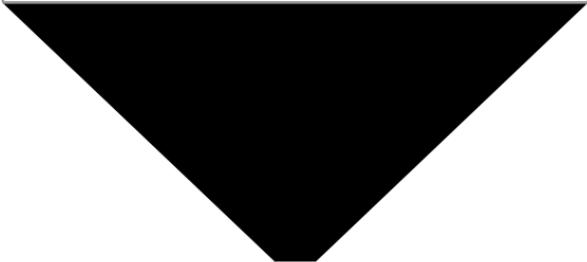
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**Multiple Book Formats Available**



- 1. Size 18 font with high contrast (2 versions)**
- 2. Audio on CD (February 2018)**
- 3. Small 5 x 7 inch book with size 12 font.**

## Want to learn more?

Extensive supplemental learning and teaching materials will be rotated regularly on the North Country Center for Independence (NCCI) website. Please visit the site frequently to read or download basic skills and ideas documents, technical and instructional documents, planning for medical care documents, planning for emergencies documents, links to American Sign Language (ASL) videos with tips, tools, skills teaching, emergency practices information and how to be safe in a fire information. Please check the website regularly for much, much more.



Kids have been a big focus of the research that went into this book. Many materials for teaching, safety plans, backpack contact cards that kids can carry to help people get them in touch with any needed adult were found in addition to coloring books and activity books. We are planning to dedicate one month to kids by placing these materials and links to others on the North Country Center for Independence website and Facebook page.

Please contact us and ask any additional materials you might like to receive if you do not see them on our website at the time that you visit. Thank you.

**The Little Book of Ideas, Skills & Practices**  
**Emergency Planning**  
**Your Advocacy to Survival Toolbox**

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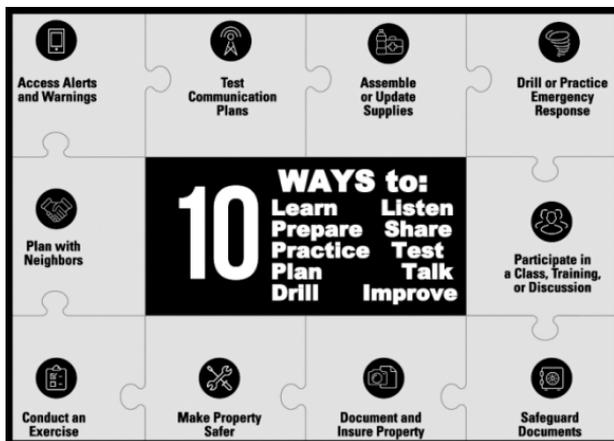
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**Introduction:  
Building Skills and Banishing Fear**

In this little book of ideas, skills and practices, we will help you fill your tool box with hope, communication skills, plans, and ideas for tools and skills to help you, your family and your community.

What you will learn in this book will help you to:

1. Be empowered to have peace of mind and a steady calmness when any emergency happens.
2. Learn to communicate and advocate for your needs and for your family.
3. Build the power to help yourself, help your family and your community by building your skills through ideas, planning and practice.

**"The Little Book of Ideas, Skills and Practices"** will help you learn that you have power in this world to affect your own life as well as the lives of others. The skills you will learn in this book will make you a beacon of light to your neighbors and friends and a strong example of what readiness can do to help everyone. Steady, Ready, Go!

**The Federal Emergency Management Administration (FEMA)<sup>1</sup> states that fewer than 40% of all Americans have any kind of emergency plan. Surprisingly, one of the groups of people that are the least prepared for an emergency at or near their home are health care workers with about 75% reporting that they have no plan. Only 14% of all Americans have spent time thinking about all the types of events or emergencies that they could experience where they live and have made a full set of plans for them.**

**When an emergency happens, we may only have ourselves, our family or community members to turn to for help. In an emergency we may learn that:**

**"We are THE ONLY help!"**

**Barriers are something people with disabilities regularly experience in the world around them. Imagine how the world you are used to could change if an emergency happened. This book will help you to combine skill building, creative thinking, planning and practice drills to be ready. Being ready will help you to more quickly overcome an emergency**

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<sup>1</sup> Preparedness in America (2014 Federal Emergency Management Administration): Technical Research Paper available by email or links.

related barrier or to adapt to the barrier by creating a safe haven in your home.

Getting ready for normal healthcare appointments or an emergency room visit is something very few Americans do routinely. People with disabilities are no different, but, we will have better experiences in both settings if we think and prepare ahead of time.

Working on your wellness includes advance preparation for routine health care, emergency health issues and emergency events.

Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity<sup>2</sup>.

In emergencies, *good health and survival*, is what happens when preparation meets health care challenge or unexpected event.

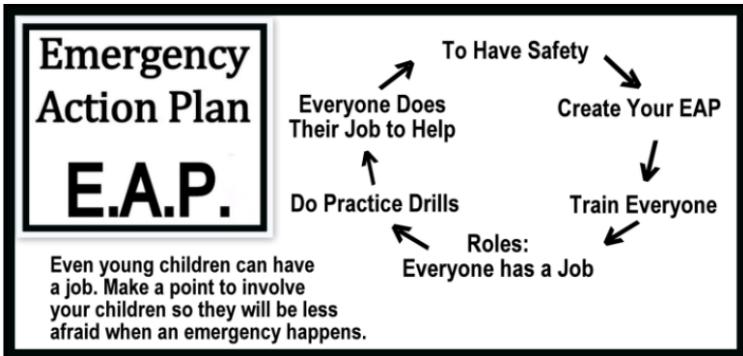
Learn the basics that you will need to know about your health and health care starting with planning for emergencies at home and away from home. Many people in your community can help you and you can help them.



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<sup>2</sup> Seneca (Roman Philosopher)

An Emergency Action Plan or E.A.P. has a cycle of practices for you to get to safety or create a safe environment during an emergency event. We'll be talking about how to build your own emergency plans throughout the book.

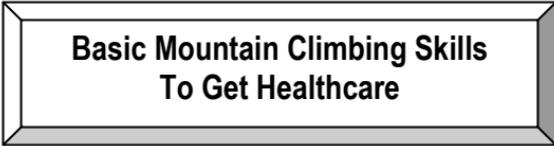


**Building Skills  
with  
Hope, Planning, Tools & Practice**

**Hope + Ideas + Skills + Planning + Practice = Readiness**

**What's Inside and How Can We Help You?**

- 1. We will give you tips, tools and ideas that will help you to get ready and then practice what you have planned.**
- 2. We will discuss the things you will need to have ready for rescue and fire workers and things you will need at home and when traveling.**
- 3. We will give you tips and ideas about how to prepare to take care of yourself in any emergency and when in the emergency room.**
- 4. We will help you learn skills in writing things down and talking with doctors, nurses, physical therapists, mental health counselors and the people that are their bosses whether for routine or emergency care.**



**Basic Mountain Climbing Skills  
To Get Healthcare**

**The first and most difficult job you have is to learn that getting good health care can be difficult even when life is going well, but, when an emergency happens, it can be even more challenging. Getting to and getting good quality health care is a high and difficult mountain to climb. It's hard for all people. Age, your health conditions and physical or mental disability can add some extra height to the mountain, but planning can help you get what you need, WHEN YOU NEED IT.**

**Rural areas have some higher mountains to climb because rural care is harder to get, with long waits to see needed specialists, a regular routine. Even local specialists can have month's long waiting lists for appointments. Travel becomes a necessity, a barrier and another challenge to get to needed specialists far away.**

**Sometimes, there are even long waitlists to get a family doctor (also known as a Primary Care Physician or a P.C.P.). Rural care providers often don't have the same level of experience as doctors in big cities, so it may take them longer to figure out what's wrong. Or, they may not be able to figure it out at all, and then, you'll have to travel to get to the bottom of what's going on.**

## Help and Helping Ideas

***Helping and being helped is part of the human experience.***

A lot of times people think of help as a four letter word. For men, this is a particularly big mountain to climb because many men do not want to go to the doctor's or won't go to see a doctor unless a close friend or family member really pressures them to do that.

In an emergency situation, everyone has fears and anxiety, even people like professional fire fighters, rescue workers and, yes, doctors! Men, please don't be so brave that you wait too long and find yourself in a health situation or emergency event that you can't escape.

Waiting too long helps no one. Being prepared can, not only help you, but help you to help others.

Women, we need to talk too. Many women put everyone and everything else first, BEFORE themselves. This too, helps no one if you neglect your own healthcare, planning for your best health or planning for emergencies of any kind.

✈ There's a reason why flight attendants instruct mothers and fathers to put their own oxygen masks on first. If you, as a parent, were to pass out BEFORE you could put your child's mask on, then you and the child are both in danger. You must apply the same principles of saving or helping

**yourself first in any medical, healthcare or emergency event in order to BE HELPFUL to those you love by being around to save or help them.**

**In an emergency, of any kind, if you need help or can give help; learn to reach out when you need or can give help, but, be prepared to care, as much as you can, for your own needs of every imaginable kind.**



**Sometimes, any one of us (whether we are able bodied or have a disability) can feel that we are helpless or that we must be helped in times of emergency.**

**There are circumstances where it is true that we are completely stuck and do need help to escape a fire, flood, car accident or a fixed mental sense of things. In those cases, the planning and preparations you will learn in this little book will help you to feel as ready and as calm as you can "in the middle of a storm".**

**However, if it is your normal state to feel that you need help for everything or that you are helpless if alone; we hope this book can give you skills, ideas and tools that will raise you out of thinking this way.**

There is an inner power and confidence that comes from learning new skills and from being prepared by planning. Please value yourself and the people you love by building your inner confidence and personal power with the tools in this book. And, while you're at it, add in any tools we didn't think of and share those with your family, friends and neighbors.

## Planning & Preparation



**Just Take the First Step.**

All people and their families need to plan ahead for healthcare, health events, appointments and emergencies to be as safe as possible when something happens. Be empowered and do your planning.

As people with disabilities, we need, even more than others, to think ahead about emergency planning, disaster planning and do practice drills for a variety of events including health emergencies, weather events, accidents or disasters. This thinking and practicing that we need to do should encompass everything we could do at home or away from home to keep us and our loved ones as safe and as healthy as possible.

**Why do we need to spend more time thinking ahead? Because, at this time in history, few counties in the State of New York have any emergency plans for natural disasters or other emergency events. And, even less counties in New York have emergency plans in place to meet the needs of people with disabilities. Many evacuation and emergency shelters are not wheelchair accessible or do not have other accessibility needs in place.**

**In truth, this is a nationwide problem in spite of the requirements and protections of the Americans with Disabilities Act <sup>3</sup>. No matter where you live, visit or travel; if you want to keep yourself and your family as safe as possible, advance planning is your best hope.**

**This kind of planning can even help to prepare us for normal health care and our wellness in some new ways to give us a better chance at the fullest and healthiest life possible.**

**Your mission, if you choose to accept it, is to be prepared.**

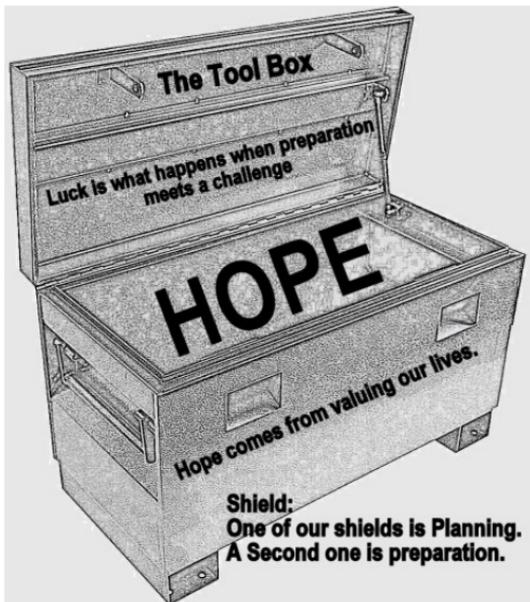


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<sup>3</sup> The "Americans with Disabilities Act" (also known as the ADA) was passed in 1990. The ADA is Civil Rights legislation meant to give people with disabilities the same rights to equality and access as all other people.

## Our Mission: Helping You Prepare

A major part of the mission of this book is to be truthful and authentic in everything that we will present as a picture of the world and the barriers (or mountains) that we all must climb. But, our biggest mission is giving you the power of hope, a "box" full of tools and the skills to prepare for your medical well being in normal and emergency situations. Use everything you learn in this book to help yourself get ready for doctor appointments, tests and basic home care if the unexpected happens.



## This Little Book's Lessons: Medical Reality

Getting good quality care, in the times when we most need it, is hard for every human on the planet. We all need a shield and a toolbox full of ideas to help us get the best we possibly can in results and services. This reality becomes a bigger challenge in any kind of emergency.

Think of yourself as a partner with anyone who provides you with care or medical treatment. You will notice that some doctors may not be used to someone acting like they are or could become a partner with them in decision making; but you know yourself better than anyone including your doctor. Your input is critical in order for any care provider to have the tools they need to really do the best job they can for you. We have ideas, tools and tips that we hope you will use to make your life better. If they work for you, then why not share them with other people you know? You could be saving a life with the ideas you share. Think about doing your practice drills with your neighbors and spread what you have learned.



Do you know about I.C.E.? ICE means In Case of Emergency. ICE is now on many cell phones at the top of the contacts menu. Add your emergency contact to your cell phone today.

## Tool Box: Use Our Tools and Add Yours

### In the Toolbox, we learn that:

- 1) Hope is valuing our lives enough to prepare.
- 2) Luck comes from preparation, planning and practice.
- 3) Our Shield is planning and preparation plus whatever gives us peace and hope.
- 4) Being ready means to help and to be helped.
- 5) People are special tools for you, your family and friends. All of you can work together to plan your work, then work the plan in the event of any emergency. This makes you, your support people and your community stronger, ready and safe.
- 6) Creating medical and emergency care partnerships empowers us and everyone around us to get the best job done in any circumstance.

## Communication Skills: Over the Walls of Distraction



No matter who you are, talking with people today is difficult because they have too many distractions. Have you ever been in a restaurant and seen a table full of people all texting on their phones? Somewhere along the way, giving the person we are with 100% of our attention has become a lost courtesy.

Whether in your provider's health care offices or in an emergency room, people who provide care being distracted by many things is routine. Doctors and their staff are usually trying to do more than one thing at a time with their patients and the staff. They get distracted by phone calls, questions from staff or students or by thinking of the paperwork they have to do (to get your insurance to pay for your care).

☎ The receptionist at the doctor's office has to answer phones, check in patients and do filing. Less than his or her full attention is going to be on you whether you are on the phone asking a question or standing right in front of him or her. 🏥 The triage nurse in the emergency room may also be only partly "with you" because he or she has been asked to do three things for three different people in the last 10 minutes.

### The Disability in the Room



The idea of paying attention to who is and who is not paying 100% attention to what you are saying is a critical "save your life" skill. Many people die due to medical errors. It's up to you to get the attention of care providers by stopping

them and restarting the discussion. This is especially important if they have spoken out loud to someone else and gotten something you said wrong.

If you find a healthcare provider staring at you, it could be a good thing. That technician, nurse or hospitalist <sup>4</sup> is probably looking at you and may be wondering what kind of help you might need to have a test done (because of your disability or disabilities). That would be a good thing if that kind of thinking was going on.

However, it's more likely that the nurse or doctor has never even given a thought to what help you might need if you are deaf, mobility impaired, blind or have anxiety issues about tests. For example, if you can't move your legs, how do they get you on that testing table? If you can't hear and it's urgent to get the test and there's no interpreter nearby, how do they and the testing technicians quickly communicate to you what needs to be done?

How do you communicate what you might have for special wishes or religious beliefs that might change what tests are done or how and when they are done?

The biggest tool in your tool box besides staying calm is being able to speak up about what you need in whatever

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<sup>4</sup> A Hospitalist is a doctor that practices only in a hospital. Many specialize in emergency care, but, others may be specialists in other areas.

way you can communicate even when your normal way to communicate is something you can't do at any particular moment.

How can you speak up when you can't talk or sign the way you usually do? It's all about planning and preparation again. To be ready for anything, you will have paperwork and documents that will speak for you even when you can't speak or sign.

Then, it's important to get and keep eye contact (when you can) to show your feelings or blink on command if that's the only way that you can communicate. For people who are blind, you can still blink on command if you can't speak, but also use touch to grab someone's hand to indicate that you need help, want something or are afraid.

Speaking, in whatever way you can, even if it is not your normal way of speaking is your path to getting what you need. And, getting the paperwork you will learn to create here to the people who can help you is your tool to speak for you when you can't speak.

You get the idea, you are going to have to **STAND OUT** and



**SPEAK UP** to be able to be heard or to get what you need. When you do speak up and then feel that your best effort didn't work out the way you wanted it to; practicing with a friend or by looking in a mirror can often help you

figure out new ideas, words and facial expressions to try. The key point is to keep trying until what you need to say is heard.



Your mission, if you choose to accept it, is to prepare, practice, adjust things and try again. You are worth the effort !

**Just take the first step!**

In your life experiences, what ideas and tools can you add to your tool box to deal with whatever has been difficult or frustrating for you at the doctor's office or in an emergency? What can you do and who can help you to brainstorm for ideas that could change things for the better?



**For Communication Skills:  
Readiness is Your Shield**

1. Practice speaking up.
2. What alternative ways can you use to communicate if you can't speak in the way you normally do?
3. Put paperwork together that will help you explain your medical conditions and what you need.
4. Make eye contact or reach out for someone's hand if you need something or feel afraid.

Between your ideas and what we have asked you to put in your toolbox here, we think you will soon get to a point where your healthcare in normal times or in an emergency will be much more productive and less frightening.

## Claiming Time for Your Message



Time is money and, in our world of medical care, that is the biggest truth of all. Everyone seems to be breathless and in a hurry. There are shortages of care providers in almost every field of medicine making this just one reason why the hurry exists.

However, we can't get quality care if we can't get our message, our questions and our concerns across to the people who provide our care. We'll help you to figure out ways to slow things down or divide things up so they can be handled in the time slots your care provider has to offer. And, we'll teach you how to ask for and get more time when it is needed.

**The Shield & the Toolbox:  
Fighting Frustration with Hope**

Each part of this book is meant to give you ideas, a reality check when needed, a toolbox full of tools and skills that you can use to help yourself and maybe even help others. But, most importantly, we want to equip you with your own "Shield of Hope".

Hope is our most important tool. Think about what hope means to you and how it impacts your health or getting health care. If things are sometimes frustrating when you try to get healthcare or when trying to get good communication with care providers; action is the antidote to giving up.

We all need to feel like we have some control over our life and our health, wellness and safety. If we lose a sense of control, we can begin to lose hope. Working to regain any hope we lose or any sense that we are losing out because we are different is critical to keeping our sense of self confidence and willingness to try again. We are different AND worth every effort, every tool and every practice session we need to go through to get the care, wellness and safety we want and need.

In your toolbox, try to have something you could imagine that would help you to get your hope back or get you ready

to try again. It would be great to imagine something that would or could be your shield. The shield would remind you to protect yourself and your health, help you to remember things (maybe even imagine writing things on your shield), and give you the strength to call the doctor again or try again when things just seem too hard.

Imagine anything that would give you strength or energy to try again. Maybe it would be a pair of cowboy boots, a heart necklace with your kid's pictures in it ♥, a real shield or a flower ☸. Anything that helps you to get back on track with your health care and lifts your spirits is what you can picture to be able to start climbing to conquer any mountain of frustration again.

**Build Your Confidence by Using Skills  
You Already Have**

Things you already know and do well in some other area of your life can be put to work to help you in getting quality medical care, communicating your needs or wishes, or getting emergency assistance. These skills that you can use in more than one place are called "transferrable skills".

So, what do you do well? Can you draw, write, sing, make people laugh or do you have a giant warm heart that just makes people smile? You can put anything you do well to work to turn the tide in your direction.

The idea is to balance the ideas of difficult things (climbing mountains) and easier things (use the things you are good at to break tensions, bring a smile, remember something important). When we balance out the difficulties with what we see and know are our strengths, we begin to behave differently. We start to "walk" with more inner strength while showing more outer confidence.

Being a good advocate (speaking up) takes doing things that will come easy to you and things that, while harder, will be much easier with practice.

Is there Light at the end of the Questions?



**Key Tip:** There are no bad questions at the doctor's office, the emergency room, the accident or the weather event that caused you to need to make an appointment, call 911 for help, go to the emergency room or evacuate your home. Asking questions is the only way for medical providers or rescue workers to be able to do their best to help you. It's just as important for you to ask them questions so that you can learn what's going on, correct any errors you might hear when they speak about your medical condition or medications and to get what you need, when you need it.

There are no magic ways to make medical care easier than it is these days. But being prepared is one of your best tools. There are great new advances in medicine and technology that give us choices we never had before and they are growing. That same growth of technology has also contributed to making the medical experience, for every person, less human and more rushed.



## Emergency Planning: It's Your Lifeline

No one wants to think about being in an emergency situation whether health related or event related (like a fire or flood). But, for people with disabilities, it is critical that we think ahead about all kinds of potential emergencies and plan for them as best as we can. We can easily find ourselves alone in very difficult, challenging or traumatic situations that, if we think ahead and get ready for them, we will be able to stay as calm as possible while we work through the plan we've made for that situation.

In this section of the book, we're going to discuss emergency planning that you can do to prepare yourself and your home for weather or natural disaster events. Then,

we'll discuss the kind of emergency planning that you might need to consider for community events, travel and, lastly, health related events.

**Safety is ALL in the Plan and the Practice**

Plan your emergency practice drill work, then work your plan. Imagine emergency events, then prepare, practice and plan for your safety in those events.

Physically going through your practice drills and doing the work you planned will help you to stay calm DURING the emergency. When the emergency happens, work the steps in your safety plan. You will be safer knowing what to do and when to do it. You will be calmer by having a clear set of steps to follow, and then, the work to do to make yourself and your home safe.

**A Joint Mission  
Preparing for Weather or Natural Disaster Events**

Many people with disabilities do not know that their county, town, city or village is required to plan for and assist people with disabilities during any emergency event that leaves you without essential services or causes you to need to leave your home.

This requirement is written into many state and federal grant contracts. Even though this is required by these grant contracts, many cities, towns and villages have not done the required planning.

Contact your contact county health department or emergency planning officials to see if your county has emergency plans for people with disabilities or for anyone. If there's no plan, maybe you could speak up to an agency or neighborhood group to get things going so that everyone is safer.

When you advocate (speaking up for things to be better), for better services and planning for people with disabilities, you help yourself and your community. When someone you know is speaking up for things to be done better, back them up by going to meetings with them or standing beside them when they speak.



## Safety is a Community Concern

People with disabilities have trouble getting into some emergency shelters or trouble getting needed services at shelters. You are part of the whole community. Be informed about what kind of shelters are in your community.

If you become aware that no shelters exist in your community that can accommodate people with disabilities (or some types of disabilities), start thinking about how you can bring attention to this issue and work with others to change it.



**Key Tip for Success in Planning:** Preparing for emergency health events, storms, flooding, power outages and natural disasters can be broken up into very small parts that you can work on one week or one month at a time. In a year, you could be ready for anything without being overwhelmed by the amount of things to do!

## Safety Plan: Information & Communications



### **Key Tip for Everyone**

Be sure that you are already in the habit of keeping your cell phone charged so that when a weather or emergency event is predicted, you will have power to call for help or comfort until the electricity is restored or help arrives.

Make sure that anyone you might call for non-emergency or emergency assistance in the event of a power outage (or other event) is someone that you're in touch with often enough that you have their most up to date phone numbers. Program those numbers into your cell phone so you don't have to try to find them in the dark or cold.



**ICE is Nice**

If you don't already have your "ICE" contact person added onto your contact list on your cell phone, do it as soon as possible.

ICE means In Case of Emergency. The white cross on a red background is the most typical symbol that is used on most cell phones to enter the name and phone number of the

person that you would choose to be contacted if you had an emergency. But, if you don't see that in your contact list, ask your cell service provider for help with this.

## Weather & Emergency Event Alerts

Photo of an "All Hazards" Emergency Weather Radio with Text Alerts



### NOAA<sup>5</sup> Weather & Emergency Alerts

The entire state of New York can have some terrible winter storms and rain storms that can lead to flooding, power outages or getting stuck in the snow. To be able to stay informed of weather conditions even if the power goes out, invest in a small battery powered weather radio with the NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) "all hazards" weather and emergency event alerts. You can buy radios that are "all hazards" radios that will come on

---

<sup>5</sup> NOAA is the National Oceanic & Atmospheric Administration.

automatically (if you want that) to give you an alert.



Many of these radios come with LCD displays that show text alerts for the deaf and hard of hearing. Some of these radios (on the middle to high end of costs) come with adaptive equipment that can make use of a:

- ✓ **Pillow vibrator** to wake individuals from sleep.
- ✓ **Strobe light** to alert individuals during waking hours.
- ✓ **Bed shaker** to shake a bed to wake individuals up.

***Visit these websites to find some options that could work for you:***

Home Safe: [www.homesafeinc.com](http://www.homesafeinc.com)

Silent Call: [www.silentcall.com](http://www.silentcall.com)

Harris Communications: [www.harriscomm.com](http://www.harriscomm.com)

Some of the "all hazards" weather radios also come with short wave radio band stations for listening to Police, Fire and Emergency Officials. The combination type radios that have both types of radio signal service are more expensive so, if budget is a consideration, start with a small hand held battery powered "all hazards" weather radio.

Make sure to follow the advice and instructions given in "all hazards" alerts and forecasts by radio, television or by emergency officials. Get ready to be able to take care of yourself alone at home or away from home, to the best of your ability, by thinking ahead when you get the alert.

With the safety plan you will make, you will learn how to get ready to be on your own, possibly without power, heat or air conditioning for three days.

## Wireless Emergency Alerts

Wireless Emergency Alerts or WEA's will allow some cell phone service customer's phones (that are enabled to receive these WEA messages) to receive text type message that warn of imminent threats to safety. These messages are targeted to the geographic area that the cell service customer is in. The Federal Emergency Management Association, FEMA, works with cell service providers and local public safety officials to create and broadcast these messages.

FEMA and the FCC (Federal Communications Commission) developed an integrated alert system called IPAWS (Integrated Public Alert Warning System) which sends warning signals to radio and television broadcast stations and satellite radio at the same time. It can also send alerts to WEA users and over the internet right to your email address.

In New York, you can sign up to receive emergency email alerts at: [www.nyalert.gov](http://www.nyalert.gov)

Some local emergency planning offices, schools and colleges also have email alerts. Ask your health department or emergency officials, your school principal or college administration office if they have these alerts if you want to sign up to get them.

## Safety Plan Needs & Tools

### Food & Water .

Be sure to have enough food *and the kinds of foods that you can eat **even with no power** for cooking.* You'll need foods that you can open and eat cooked or not.

Protein is critical (dried or canned meat, cheeses, peanut butter, nuts) as well as crackers, bread or fruits and something to drink. You will need to stock up on, at least, three days worth of food that you can eat without having to cook it on a stove. If you do have a gas stove with an electric starter, be very careful to take precautions in lighting the stove with a match by disposing of the match in a small bowl of water or in your empty sink.

Stock up on canned foods that you can open with a pull tab or a manual (not electric) can opener that you can use during an emergency event. If you have trouble using your hands to open things, another idea is to ask someone to help you get food ready.

Get the canned foods you want opened, with your helper, and ready to go in easy to open dishes when you get an advance warning of an emergency event or a storm. Place the food in your refrigerator and only open your refrigerator when you're going to eat if your power is out. The insulation in your refrigerator will help your foods to stay safe to eat for a couple of days. Ask your aide, helper, a friend or neighbor for help in getting these things ready if you can't do it alone.

**☒** Water is the most important drink you need. Have at least two gallons per person or per pet of drinking water stashed where you can get to them if you're alone. A three day supply of water for two people would be six gallons of water.

If you have enough advance warning and it's going to be cold, make a thermos or two of soup, hot chocolate or another hot beverage you like to help you keep warm. 🍵

**Prepare yourself  
Get your tools together  
Write things down  
Think ahead  
Be confident  
Be Ready  
Be Safe**

 Light

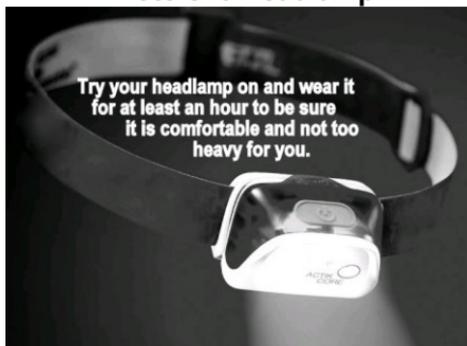
If you are able to walk whether sighted or blind, think ahead about what usually helps you get around. Do you see shadows or reflections from lamps that you might not see without power? Can you navigate in your home in complete darkness (meaning not even a streetlight to assist you)?

 No matter what your disability or ability is, you will want flashlights with fresh batteries to be within reach of someplace that you can reach easily and quickly from wherever you are or where you can go to get one in your practice drills. Get in the habit of keeping a flashlight in every room and keep it in the same place where everyone will know where it is and can get it, when needed.

 If you are mobility impaired or have trouble holding things with your hands, consider investing in a lightweight, battery powered head lamp (like campers and hikers use) that you can use to help yourself find your way around your home if the power goes out.



### Photo of a headlamp



If you will be using and wearing a head lamp, be sure to put this on as soon as you purchase it and wear it for, at least, one hour. You need to do this to make sure it fits right and is something that you can put on by yourself. It might be too heavy and then you will want to buy one that is lighter weight.

In your practice drills, is the headlamp BRIGHT ENOUGH to help you in complete darkness? If the headlamp is hard to put on, feels too heavy or isn't bright enough, take the head lamp back and find something that works for you in every way that you need. When the power goes out or another reason causes you to need it, you'll have WHAT YOU NEED.

There are push button, stick on, battery operated lights you can install on bathroom walls, near your bed or in tight places to help you find your way. Usually, you can find these in dollar stores, drugstores and discount stores. Some of these lack enough adhesive to stay up in

prolonged cold conditions, so consider getting some double backed tape or industrial strength sticky Velcro that you can cut to size and use to attach these lights to the walls.

 If being without light makes you extremely anxious or worried, stock up on extra batteries for your flashlights, headlamps or battery powered push button lights you have or purchase. Put them, and your flashlights, where you can find them quickly.

Trying out any emergency item you buy is important and should be part of your practice drills and checks.



**Key Tip for the Blind:** Light is critical, even for the blind, because it can help other people find you. Get both yourself and your home ready the same way a sighted person would.



Sound



Whether it's a cold or hot type of emergency, being able to call for help can be the difference between getting help, getting found or not getting help. Some of us have big voices so, as long as our energy is intact, we can yell. If your voice wears out, clap your hands, whistle or bang a

wall to make people aware that you need help and to help them locate you.



**Key Tip for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing:** Even if you can't hear the sound, emergency personnel can hear you making noise in whatever way you can. Get yourself and your home equipped with whatever you need to make some noise. 🔔



We have some ideas for a few tools that could help you if you're a person who can't make much noise on your own or if you get too tired to make noise the way we have discussed so far.

For some people, a powerful whistle is all you need. As soon as you hear that any emergency could threaten you in your home, put your whistle on and you're ready to go.



There are some LED (LED means "Light Emitting Diode") flashlights that are lightweight and have three functions which are:

- 1) Flashlight in white light,
- 2) Flashing light in red and
- 3) A whistle installed at the end of the light.

This kind of three in one tool would be great to put in your toolbox. We have some pictures below. The 3 in 1 flashlight and whistle can be purchased at: [www.lifegear.com](http://www.lifegear.com)



Two other sound making tools are a small "air horn" (they come small enough to fit in your purse or a small bag) and a personal alarm. For both of these tools, you'll need to be able to squeeze the horn or push the personal alarm button on (and off) to set it off. You can find either type of noise making device in hardware, sporting goods, drugstores and on the internet. Be sure to test any device when you purchase it to make sure it works BEFORE you need it.

 **Plan Ahead To Get Help and Be Found** 

All of the tools that we have talked about in the light and sound section can be used to help other people know you where you are and they will help them to find you. Don't wait until it's too late, buy some items for your emergency planning and try them out ahead of time to make sure you get the best tools for you.



Some fire stations, emergency planning boards or town, village, city or county officials will work with you to:

1. Learn where you live and what kind of help you might need,
2. Learn how, if you were able to, you would signal your location or your need for help,
3. Learn how your disabilities might make it hard for you to get help in a power outage, snow and ice emergency, flood or fire and,
4. Learn how long you can be safely alone if they have to triage (sort out) who needs help the most **FIRST**.



## **Make Connections with People →**

**Begin your safety planning community connections by calling your local fire department on their regular office phone number (not the emergency phone number) and asking them how you can arrange to be found and get help if an emergency or natural disaster of any kind happens.**

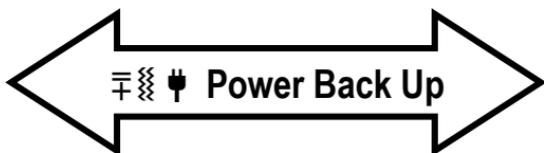
**You can also visit with or call an emergency planning official and leaders of your local emergency rescue service to let them know where you live and what you need if an emergency happens. Ask them what you can do to help them find you or get them to check in on you.**



## **Faith Community Connections**

**Places of worship can often be helpful and are sometimes used as shelters. Long BEFORE you ever need help, get to know the churches, temples, synagogues, fire departments and any other shelter locations that are located in your neighborhood or near places where you work, go to college, school or travel. The closer they are to you, the greater chance you will have of getting help from them or getting to them for help when any kind of emergency arises.**

Introduce yourself to the people that are leaders in these places. You will want the places of worship, shelters and fire department to be thinking of and looking for you when any emergency happens.



**Key Tip for:  
People Using Powered Medical Equipment**

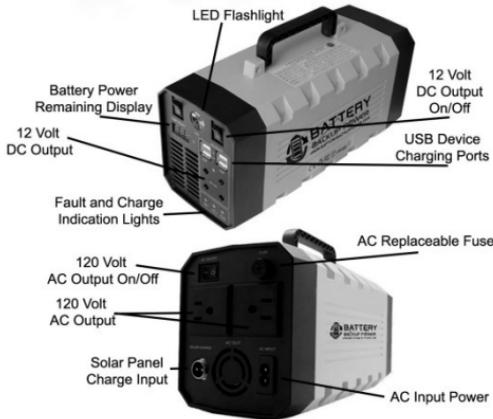
If your wheelchair is a power wheelchair, get in the habit of keeping it fully charged every night, so that you won't be caught without enough "juice" if the power goes out.



If you have other types of electric powered medical equipment, do you have a way to power it with batteries or a generator in the event this was needed? If not, call to get help from a friend, family member or neighbor to get to a hospital, shelter or any other location that emergency officials can direct you to so that you can have a "safe harbor" while waiting for things to get back to normal at home.

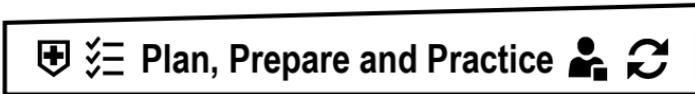
## Power Banks & Generators

Some hardware, boating, farm, camping, hiking or RV stores and websites stock battery powered back up power sources. Most of these are very heavy and require charging to be ready for use. If you live in a small home or apartment (or in any city where there is no space or place for a gas powered generator) this type of device could give you power for a limited amount of time for medical equipment. These devices are often called a powerhouse or a power bank. You can also find solar generators for portable power for smaller powered medical devices.



Gas or Diesel fuel powered generators, when you have the space to set them up safely, are another way to generate power for your medical equipment. Prices range widely so, if budget is a concern, get a generator that can power your

most urgently needed medical equipment or your water pump if you have a well powered by an electric pump.



Plan for your safety, then work your safety plan. Any or all of the ideas in this book can become part of your safety plan and practice makes perfect. You, your family and friends are worth it!



Practice drills are critical to your safety even if you live alone. Practice drills also help families and neighbors know what to do, when to do it and who will be doing each task. Children can be assigned tasks that will not only help them to stay safe, but help them to keep their minds busy when an emergency happens. They will feel more confident having had the chance to practice BEFORE any emergency happens.

Besides the tools, food, sound, light and connecting with your community that we've already discussed, you will need to create an evacuation plan. Sometimes this would consist of how to leave your home from your normal exit doors. But

you will also need to consider other ways to get out of your home if the doors are blocked off.

If you can't exit through the normal means, what options exist that will work through windows, fire escapes, skylights or cellar doors? If you are unable to use any alternative escape route, part of your emergency planning and practice drilling needs to include ways to create a "safe harbor" in your home and how you can indicate to the outside world, as quickly as possible, that you need help and the precise location (to the best of your ability) where they can find you to get you to safety.

Having practice drills at home in the darkest conditions possible will help you to stay safe in a power outage no matter where or when it happens. Having practice drills that imagine or create a number of possible emergencies, weather events or natural disasters will help you, your family and neighbors to build confidence, reduce anxiety during emergencies and find out ahead of time what is NOT WORKING so that you can fix that.



**Key Tip:**

### **Emergency Blankets (Space Blankets)**

An emergency blanket is so lightweight and small when folded, it is easy to store in a purse, pocket or inside a glove compartment when you travel. It can also help you to stay warmer under your blankets at home when the heat or

power goes out. Prices are very inexpensive ranging from \$3.00 to about \$20.00 on the internet. You can usually find them in the camping, sporting goods (bicycling) supplies or automotive section of many stores too.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Finding What You Need When YOU Need It</b></p>
--

For all of us, but, especially for people with disabilities; being able to get to the things you need or want, when you need them is critical!

If you have home health aides or personal assistants, have they learned to always put things away where you will be able to reach or find them in an emergency?

If you have an aide or assistant that does not put things where you can readily find them every day, then step one in your safety plan has to be training your aides or assistants to get in the habit of ALWAYS putting everything you need where you want it to be. This is critical because you need to be able to help yourself at times of emergencies when you are alone.

This means that for both your everyday and your emergency items, get your helpers to put things where YOU can get to them easily and quickly when you are alone. This is what can make the difference between doing well in an emergency or having a very difficult time.



Your safety and life can depend on building these habits and practices alone and with your aides or helpers. For those of us who have personal assistants or home health aides, we all usually like our aides and assistants. Sometimes, we find it hard to speak up to them or to correct a habit that may be bad for us when we are alone or in an emergency. Or, maybe, we just get tired of repeatedly asking them to put things where we want and need them.



**Key Tip:** Remember, **SOMETIMES**, we alone, are the **ONLY HELP**. Build independence and safety practices that include training your aides to put things where they belong. In an emergency, your life could depend on it.

 **Keeping Warm**

### ***What do you need for an emergency weather event?***

You've got to be prepared for a loss of power which could mean that you might get cold. For cold weather preparations, invest in some polypropylene (a special type of thermal fabric) or wool long underwear for your top and the bottom of your body. The core of your body, which is

the area of your chest and stomach, needs warmth to protect the functions of your vital organs. Protecting and keeping the core area of your body warm will help your brain to operate better as well. And, while we're speaking about your head, make sure you have a nicely fitted (close to your head, not loose), warm winter hat that you can put on during cold weather events that include a power outage. Wool and many synthetic materials for hats will work well to keep the heat from escaping from your body through the top of your head.

For the core of your body, if your budget is limited, buy the long underwear top first. If you are ambulatory (if you can walk), moving around can help you to stay warm. Long underwear made out of **cotton will not keep you warm** when there is a power outage. And, if cotton long underwear gets wet, it can raise your chances of getting hypothermia (getting too cold and putting your health at risk). **Both wool or polypropylene** fabrics for fitted long underwear **can help keep your core body temperature warm** even if you or your clothes get wet.



**Key Reminder:** The right clothing can preserve or save your health and life. Remember that long underwear made from cotton cannot help you keep your core body temperature warm. Invest in some polypropylene or wool long underwear to make sure you're warm and that you will stay warm, even if you get wet from snow, rain or flooding.

If you're not ambulatory and a power outage or cold weather event is threatened in a weather forecast, think about getting into bed, before the weather causes the power go out. You will want to get into bed before the cold starts to set into your body. Make sure that you have some of your warmest blankets or quilts on the bed and wear that long underwear.



**Keeping Cool & Flushing  
Your Toilet**



If you lose power during the hot months of summer and it's not going to be turned back on for awhile due to storm or wind damage, the danger of your body getting overheated is a health concern. Filling your tub with water before any extreme weather event (cold or hot) is a good idea for many reasons. If it's going to be hot and you're ambulatory, you can sit in that water to cool off or use that water on towels to drape over the hot parts of your body to cool down if you can't get in the tub.



**That water could also help  
anyone trapped by a fire.**

If you live in the country and have a power water pump or well, a tub full of water can be used (with a bucket or small bowl) to flush your toilet. To do that flushing, you will not need as much water as you think. Use about one third of a bucket and pour the water QUICKLY into the toilet. Experiment with it ahead of time to see how much water you need exactly to flush the toilet.

To conserve water or if you run out of water, two ideas to take care of the "flushing the toilet problem" are illustrated below.



Prepare yourself  
Get your tools together  
Write things down  
Think ahead  
Be confident  
Be Ready  
Be Safe



## Safe Harbor in a Fire When You Can't Get Out

In a fire, a tub full of water is essential if you cannot get out of your home. If you do not have a tub, buy a large basin or a few buckets that you can put inside your shower stall. Fill them up to store water when an alert threatens a power outage. Go into the bathroom and wet some towels to place around the doors and into cracks that you can get to (where fire could enter your home or apartment).



**Fire Safety Tip:** If a door or any area already feels hot (in the air around you or as you approach it) when you get close to it, **DO NOT TOUCH IT**. Do **NOT** open any doors that feel hot as you approach them, not even with a potholder or gloves! You can be blasted off your feet with the power of the fire on the other side and you could be burned.

To create your safe harbor, place wet towels where it feels safe and cool enough to block any areas where fire could come in. Then go back to the bathroom and place wet towels at the base of that door and into any cracks. Get into the tub (if you can) if things get hotter and hotter near the bathroom door. If you cannot get into the tub alone, wet towels and have them ready to keep yourself cool if you get hot. Wet your clothes if fire is able to reach under or through the cracks you have sealed. Keep yourself wet and ready to escape when help reaches you.

Listen for emergency workers that might be coming close enough to hear you and then make some noise! Follow directions, when any emergency worker speaks to you, as best as you can.

Fire Safety Tips for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing



If you are deaf or hard of hearing, the advance work you will do in making connections with your community and fire officials is even more critical when you can't escape a fire. Your advance preparation will have them already alerted that you won't be able to respond to verbal commands.

In the emergency, when this happens, you must work your hardest to make noise with your hands, your whistle, your voice, your personal alarm device, an air horn or whatever

you find that you can use to make noise to help emergency officials locate you and help you to escape to safety. Making noise, as much as possible, for as long as you possibly can will save your life.

Fire workers are often overwhelmed by many loud noises during a fire. To help them locate you, keep a rhythmic noise going that only a human being could think to create. Make it regular and in a rhythm that could not be mistaken for a random sound. To practice this, ask hearing family members or friends to listen to you when you create a rhythm to use during an emergency. Ask them if it "sounds like" a song rhythm or if it sounds more random. Watch them clap their hands or tap their feet and mimic what they're doing to help you create and memorize your personal NOT RANDOM rhythm that you can re-create in an emergency.



A visit to rescue and fire officials, BEFORE any emergency ever occurs, is your best insurance of finding or creating ways to communicate with them when they are needed.



**Tip for Everyone:** Tell emergency workers, as quickly as possible, about any and all of your disabilities or illnesses so they can work to understand what you will need to be assisted out safely and rescued.



## Planning for the Deaf & Hard of Hearing

If you are deaf or hard of hearing, all of the topics discussed here need to be part of an advance preparations talk (or personal visit) with emergency services people in your town, city, village, place of worship or shelter **BEFORE** any weather event, flood or emergency occurs. This will enable them and you to know what to do and to practice it ahead of time. Let them know how you think you can help them to find you and what they can do to help you in any kind of emergency.

Find out what is available in your community if power, cell tower or phone service goes down that could help you to communicate what you need and where you are in an emergency. Call, write to or email NCCI (the North Country Center for Independence) for links to videos made by expert fire officials using American Sign Language and for links to planning materials in documents that are specifically for the deaf and hard of hearing.



**Key Question & Tips (Ideas & Tools):** If everything you normally used to communicate with hearing people was not working and an interpreter could not be found immediately, what would or could you do? Think about buying and using the flash light with the flasher and whistle (the three in one unit) we talked about earlier to let people know where you are and that you need help.

Another thing you could do in advance is to write down the most important things you would like to communicate. Organize them by typing or writing up a document. You could also print out postcard sized statements on some cardstock and then laminate the postcards to keep them dry and sturdier in an emergency. With laminated cards, your ability to communicate your needs could withstand floods or water used to fight a fire to rescue you.

Poke a hole through all of these cards or papers and put them on a key ring to make them easy to hold. The key ring will keep them together as you work to escape or wait to be rescued. The whole thing could even be hung around your neck on a ribbon or chain or clipped to your belt or waistband. Protect this all in plastic if you do not laminate the pages. If you have to wet your entire body down to escape a fire, these cards need to be in plastic (or laminated or BOTH) to be able to help you communicate once you are out.

**Don't wait, take this step TODAY!**

Use a quick pinch (one thumb) type of clip (pictured on the next page), often called a caribbeaner clip to clip things (communication cards, emergency information) onto your belt, purse, waistband or backpack using only one hand. This type of clip also works well with a Polar Water bottle to have water clipped where you can get it with one hand.

## Tools

### One finger clip\_

This kind of clip goes on easily with just one hand. Just press in and open it with your thumb.



Caribbeaner Style Pinch Clip

### Polar Water Bottle



Polar Bottles: [www.polarbottle.com](http://www.polarbottle.com)



**Conserving Energy**

If you have food in your refrigerator, open it only when necessary to conserve the cold that can help you be able to eat some of the food inside. Don't open your freezer at all unless you need ice for an injury. Keeping the freezer door closed can potentially allow you to save some of the foods you have inside the freezer and the refrigerator.



**Conserve Your Own Energy**



An emergency or crisis of any kind can be traumatic. When a traumatic event happens, it is easy for our bodies to be "amped up" with a fight or flight response. It's important to

remember that you can do advance work and planning to limit how much anxiety or trauma you might feel. It's also important to plan in advance to find ways to calm yourself down in your mind. This is critical to helping you to reserve your strength and energy for when, where and how it is needed most.

Help Emergency Services people to help you.  
Prepare today. Take the first step, get ready!

🛡️ Emergency services people may need your help in learning how to communicate with you, lift you and to be aware of any wounds or injuries you may have as part of your normal life with disability or as a result of the emergency. They can get you to whatever help you need the fastest if you are able to stay calm and give them instructions and direct them to what you need the most.



**Evacuating to a Shelter  
or  
Sheltering in Place**



**The hurricanes of 2011 to 2017 are clear evidence that, sometimes, the best path to safety means leaving your home, no matter where you live.**

**Many New Yorkers toughed out the Ice Storm in the late 1990's and, with that experience, they know the hardships that came along with staying home. During the Ice Storm, if you weren't already prepared, stocked up with food and had a back-up power generator; you were probably isolated and alone, hungry, cold and with no way out of many areas for days or weeks. It was freezing cold.**

**During the ice storm, many people died from carbon monoxide poisoning because the kerosene heaters they used to keep warm were not ventilated properly to an outdoor vent or window. Toxic vapors build up without ventilation. Since we cannot smell carbon monoxide, we do not even know it's there harming us, unless we have a carbon monoxide detector. They are inexpensive and worth every penny because they can save your life.**



## Things to buy:

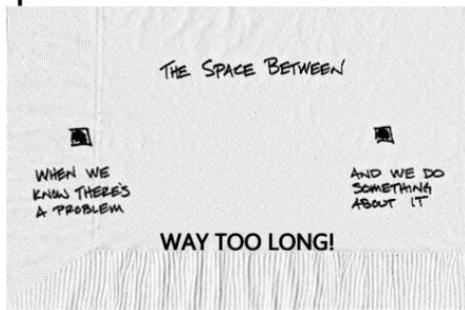
 Smoke Detector

 Carbon Monoxide Detector



**Key Tip:** No Matter what the reason you might have to evacuate your home, when doing so, move quickly, but carefully. Don't let your fight or flight response take over. That could cause you to rush, panic and fall.

 Weather forecasting is getting better every year and climate warming seems to be undeniable. If your weather forecasters and emergency officials are advising you to evacuate, do it and give yourself a chance that many people haven't had. But, when you evacuate, go prepared with all of the essentials we discuss in this book to keep yourself, warm, dry, fed and "watered" as needed while you travel to a shelter or a place that is not threatened.



## Pack Your "Go Bag"

 **BEFORE** an Emergency Happens 

Get (or make up) a "Go Bag" ready and standing by. Every family member and pet needs one. Every person or pet needs to do their best to "carry their own weight". Many pet stores have backpacks for dogs of all sizes. For cats, a carrier stuffed with their needs inside (secured well to keep kitty safe) is more appropriate. If you had to leave your home in 5 minutes, are you ready?

If you choose to add to the list of essential items we've included here, remember that you or someone you are with will need to carry these items everywhere you go at all times. Get the lightest weight items you can find for everything you pack. Just as an example, one gallon of water weighs 8 pounds. That weight alone can be exhausting to carry very far. Get a backpack or duffle that you can slip over your arms so that you can carry children, pets or use a free hand to help yourself over debris. Travel light and carry what you need. You will need to also load your "go bag" and wear it around your house one day for an hour to see how it feels all loaded up. This practice effort will help to be very realistic about what you can and cannot carry. It will help you to think of alternative means to carry what you need.

## The "Go Bag" Essentials Checklist

- Flashlight & Whistle
- Your fully charged cell phone with extra fully charged batteries
- Battery-operated NOAA "all hazards" and/or shortwave radio & extra batteries
- Bivvy Bag or Emergency Blanket for each family member
- Dust mask, Sunglasses, Eye Protection
- Pocket knife (with multiple tools, like a Swiss Army Knife)
- Emergency cash in small denominations, quarters for phone calls
- Butane lighter and matches
- Sturdy shoes, a season appropriate change of clothes, and a warm hat or hat with brim for hot, sunny weather.
- Local and regional maps with writing paper and pen (compass, if you know how to use one, with your maps)
- Water and food (snacks and one or two bottles per person)
- Permanent marker, paper and duct tape (light color)
- Photos of family members and pets for identification purposes
- List of emergency point-of-contact phone numbers
- List of allergies to any drug (especially antibiotics) or food
- Copy of health insurance and identification cards

- Extra prescription eye glasses, hearing aid or other vital personal items
- Prescription medications (1 week supply, minimum) and first-aid supplies
- Toothbrush, toothpaste, soap or "bathing wipes"
- Roll of toilet paper
- Extra keys to your house and vehicle
- Any disability specific items for children, seniors or family members
- Lightweight, "pop-up" tent for 1 to 2 people

  **The Pet "Go Bag"**  

- Go-Bags for Pets: Sturdy leashes and pet carriers. (A pillowcase is a quick option for transporting cats and other small animals.)
- Food, water and medicine for at least 1 week
- Non-spill bowls, manual can opener and plastic lid
- Plastic bags, litter box and litter
- Recent photo of each pet
- Names and phone numbers of your emergency contact, emergency veterinary hospitals and animal shelters
- Copy of your pet's vaccination history and any medical problems

## Refuge at Home

If you can't leave home or choose to tough things out for personal reasons, the best chance for you to be safe is to be prepared. Make and practice your emergency plans enough that you have them memorized.

Stay calm and work the plan that goes with the type of event that you are expecting. Be prepared for things to go wrong or to happen more quickly than you expected by considering AHEAD of time what you would do if flood waters rose far faster and higher than you had anticipated AND you had decided to stay in your home.

## Evacuating to an Emergency Shelter

Every community has some types of emergency shelters. Sadly, there is no standard for emergency shelters in terms of who organizes them, whether locally, at the county level or statewide. Because the federal government leaves many decisions like this to states, the United States has a "patchwork quilt" of shelter operations and emergency planning. Some counties in New York State do have full emergency plans with evacuation plans suited to people with disabilities and shelters that can house people with disabilities.

## Disability in the Emergency Shelter

There is also no set state or national "standard of reality" for what kind of access an emergency shelter may or may not have for people with disabilities. There are federal laws and (state and federal) grant contract requirements that require cities, towns and villages to make all emergency services and shelters accessible to people with disabilities.

However, many cities, towns, counties and states are very, very far away from complying with those laws by creating their own emergency plans that **INCLUDE** plans to make existing shelters accessible (or to build new accessible shelters). Before you attempt to leave your home or place of work for a shelter, do you know if the shelter you're heading for has what you need to accommodate your disabilities or any medical conditions?

If you find out that your community has few or no shelters that can work for people with disabilities, it's a good opportunity to start talking to your neighbors, family and friends to come up with short term and long term solutions. Start conversations with your local representatives and emergency officials.



**Shelters: The Big Questions  
Add Yours In**

- 1. Does this shelter have a ramp and enough power for power wheelchair users to charge their batteries? If it does, how many people in power wheelchairs can be safely accommodated there?**
- 2. Does the shelter have a hand cranked Hoyer lift to move people who can't walk at all to manual wheelchairs or some other place to rest or sit if their batteries die?**
- 3. Does this shelter have enough power for sleep apnea patients, people who use respirators at night and people using other powered medical equipment?**
- 4. Will this shelter have any American Sign Language interpreters or alternative communications devices?**
- 5. Could my hearing aid be charged here every night?**
- 6. I'm blind, will you have anyone who can help me fill out forms or guide me to places you would want me to go?**

**How Can You Help Questions: Add Them In**

7. I speak Spanish and French, who could I help if I was sheltered here?
8. I am a trained counselor, who can I help in this shelter?
9. I know CPR and Basic First Aid, who can I help and where should I go first?
10. I'm a great cook, where can I go to help prepare meals?

All of these questions, especially the ones that relate to whether you can be safe or even get into a nearby shelter point out the need to make community connections **BEFORE** you ever need to evacuate to an emergency shelter.

**First Things First, then Take the Rest of the Steps!**

If you learn, in your advance planning, that no shelters can accommodate your disability needs, the first thing to do is to **MAKE A PLAN** knowing that you have to turn elsewhere or rely on yourself. Get your "Go Bag" packed and **BE READY**.

The second thing to do is start speaking up to get your whole community aware of this issue. If you don't, who will? If you don't, who could be left behind? Speak up, act in the best interest of yourself and other community members with disabilities.

The third thing to do is your "homework" to find the closest shelter to you that *can accommodate you* with your specific disabilities. It might be in a different town or in a friend's home in the country.

The fourth thing to do is to create a plan to "get out of town" if terrible weather is coming and there are no shelters that can accommodate you. Leave before the rest of the crowd and know where to go (to the best of your ability) to get to safety and shelter.



Make all of your time and your presence in conversations count. No matter what ability or disability you have, try to represent the needs of everyone in the community when you ask questions about emergency planning or shelters in your community. We all need each other.

**Helping and being helped is part of the human experience.**

### Public Areas of Refuge

For the readers living in rural areas, some of you may not know that many (usually urban) buildings have areas of refuge for the public. These are places to seek safe harbor or shelter in the event of a natural disaster, weather event or terrorist attack. These areas are meant for very short term use until people can be safely moved out, moved to a longer term shelter or be able to safely head home. Most buildings that have a public area of refuge have signs indicating where they are or showing the directions to the area of refuge.

The next time you are in your local hospital, large community building, government center or hotel, see if you can spot some signs that say "Area of Refuge" or "Public Area of Refuge".

### Plan, Prepare & Practice

By now, you've learned a lot about what you need to have on hand to be ready for any emergency. You have probably started to think about how you would prepare for yourself, if you live alone or for your family, if not.

The first step in the planning is a self assessment of what skills, strengths and weaknesses you or your family may

have. Everyone has things that they do very well and other things that they struggle with or need help to accomplish.

### Basic Skills Assessment Questions

1. What kind of skills do you have or do your family members have ?
2. Who is the best at staying calm?
3. Who can always remember where everything is?
4. Who has the greatest physical strength or agility?
5. Who is the person who can fix anything?
6. Who can make everyone laugh?



**Key Tip for Everyone:** Don't sell yourself short on your skills no matter what your disability might be. Be clear and speak up about your strengths in order to help yourself, your family and your community.

**Skills Assessments: Assigning Jobs**

If strength is your thing and you are blind, you should be the one helping everyone out of the window in a fire. Practicing this and finding the best ways to make it work for you and for others is going to be your key to a quick exit.

Who is the "Island of Peace" (and calm) in your household? That person should be the one taking command during an emergency and helping everyone else to remember what their job is and when to do it.

Who is the ultimate organizer in your house? They should be in charge of making sure that EVERYONE knows where all of your emergency supplies are and that everything is tried, checked and replaced, when needed. That person should make sure that the right "extra" clothing for the season you are in, is packed in each "go bag".

Do you have a technical or mechanical type of person in the house that is great at fixing things, figuring out new ways to do things or create things? That person is going to be the key to helping you find alternate ways to meeting a need that you might not have anticipated.





**The Family Plan**


For families, the key to a good plan starts with assessing everyone's skills and strengths. Have a family discussion to create jobs for each person and then, with those job assignments, try a practice drill. Even very young children can have small jobs to do.

**The Solo or "With Community" Plan**

If you live alone, your plan whether you have community partners right away or not, needs to also start with an assessment of your own skills and strengths as well as your needs and weaknesses. Have a discussion with friends or family members to kick things off and get some help with ideas about your strengths, skills, needs and weaknesses. See if any of them would be willing to be part of your safety and emergency planning. If so, they can do an assessment of their skills, strengths, needs and weaknesses right along with you.

Emergency  
Action Plan

**E.A.P.**

**Prepare yourself  
Get your tools together  
Write things down  
Think ahead  
Be confident  
Be Ready  
Be Safe**

## Key Items to Include in Your Plan & Emergency Binder

What you are about to read is a set of lists of POSSIBLE things you and your family (or neighbors) could include in your emergency planning, your emergency binder and on a USB Memory Drive Digital "Binder". We have included the need to have physical copies of keys (can be done at hardware stores, some discount stores or ordered from vehicle makers). The keys can be made and placed in your binder or on a special key ring that is attached to your binder. You will see that not all of these documents will apply to you or your family members, but, if they do; they should be included.



### The Emergency Binder Lists



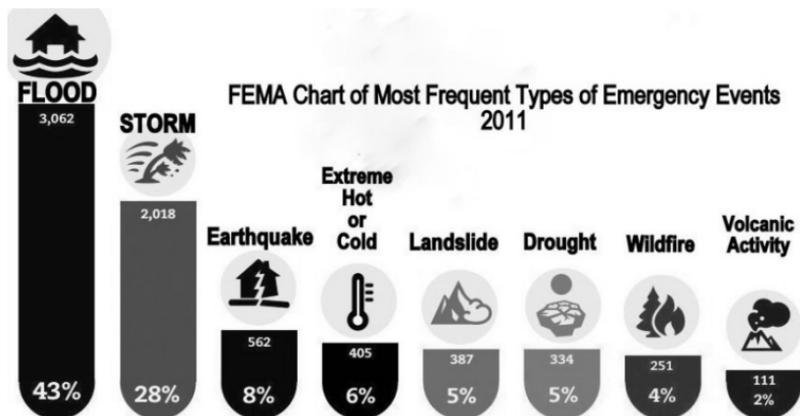
#### Priority 1: Identification & Location

**1. Emergency Contact & ID Cards** (for every family member) with phone numbers, addresses and emails for important people you know in and out of town that you may need or want to contact. Write in your family emergency meeting place! We have some sample Emergency ID Contact cards here that you might want to try (page 71 and 72).

Consider pasting a photo of your child where the black CDC<sup>6</sup> Logo is on the front of this card for kids. When done printing (on heavy paper or cardstock for durability), attaching a photo and filling out the cards, cut along the lines and glue the front to the back of the card.

Once the glue has dried (several hours), laminate the card on both sides or put it in a protective plastic cover. You could also punch a hole in the corner of the card so that you could put it on a key ring or clip for your child.

For adults, we have created an Emergency ID and Contact Card especially for people with disabilities. Print out extra copies of the card you need so that you can update your information every year.



<sup>6</sup> The CDC is the Center for Disease Control. They provided the ID Cards.

☐ For kids from the CDC:

BACKPACK EMERGENCY CARD	
Child's Name: _____	Cell Phone: _____
Date of Birth: _____	_____
Home Phone: _____	_____
School Name: _____	_____
School Phone Number: _____	_____
Special needs, medical conditions, allergies, important information: _____ _____ _____	
DIAL 911 FOR EMERGENCIES	
	
Parent/Guardian/Concierge Name: _____	Email: _____
Cell Phone: _____	Alternate Phone: _____
Tell Okay, Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Employer: _____
Name: _____	Address: _____
Cell Phone: _____	Alternate Phone: _____
Tell Okay, Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Employer: _____
Out of Town Contact Name: _____	Address: _____
Cell Phone: _____	Alternate Phone: _____
DIAL 911 FOR EMERGENCIES	

For Adults

EMERGENCY ID CARD		Social Security Number
FRONT OF CARD	NAME _____	Glue Recent Photo Here
	ADDRESS _____	
	PHONE _____	
	EMERGENCY CONTACT _____	
	_____	LEFT THUMB PRINT
	SEX _____ DOB: _____ AGE _____	Update Card And Photo Every Year
	WEIGHT _____ FAITH _____	
	EYE COLOR _____	
	HAIR COLOR _____	
	BLOOD TYPE _____ HEIGHT _____	
SCARS, TATOOS, MARKS on BODY: _____	RIGHT THUMB PRINT	

EMERGENCY ID CARD		Check or Say "Yes or No" Then glue 1 or both pictures in box
BACK OF CARD	Medical Conditions or Diagnoses _____	PHOTO BELOW IS: FAMILY:    PROXY:
	List Disabilities _____	
	All Allergies _____	GLUE RECENT FAMILY PHOTO HERE OR
	List of Needs _____	PICTURE OF MEDICAL PROXY OR
	Family Doctor Name and Phone Number: _____	AUTHORIZED MEDICAL DECISION MAKER (IF YOU CAN'T SPEAK)

When you are finished with both side of the card, trim the edges with scissors and glue the backs of the cards together, then laminate or put in plastic cover.

To be able to have this card fit in your wallet, the print had to be small. Please seek assistance in filling this out if it is hard for you to see or to write in the small spaces. Be sure to print this out on heavy paper or cardstock, then glue the back to the front. When the glue is dry, laminate your card or put it in a protective plastic cover.

Whether you are doing these cards for yourself or your children, remember to update them every year.

**Priority 2: Recent Photos**

**Recent Physical Photos of Every Family Member** (including pets) with their names, age, weight and special descriptions or instructions and the location of the family meeting place. For example: make easy to carry single photos to put on a key ring or, put your family photos into your binder:



With these photos ready to go, you'll be able to get help finding family members that are lost or separated from you, if your cell phone photos can't be accessed.

**Priority 3: Medical Documents**

- +  A List of Medications**
- +  A List of ALL Allergies**
- +  A List with Your Doctors Names & Contact Information**
- +  Immunization and Vaccination Records for Everyone**

**+**  A Copy of Your "Who I Am & What I Need" Statement (see the section called: "Going to the Emergency Room" to learn more about this).

**+**  A List or Written Summary of Your Medical History, Diagnoses, Conditions, Past Surgeries & Disabilities (a medical resume)

**+**  A Copy of Advanced Directives, Medical Proxy Paperwork, Living Wills, MOLST<sup>7</sup> Forms or DNR Orders (Do Not Resuscitate Orders) that any Family Member Might Have

**+**  Dental Records and a List of Dentists You Have Seen

To help you remember what is most important to REMEMBER, here's an acronym (a memory tool), its MAD! Medications, Allergies, Doctors or MAD.

**Medications**

**Allergies**

**Doctors**




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<sup>7</sup> MOLST or Medical Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment are unique to New York State.

<b>Priority 4: Important Documents</b>
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 **Copies of Important Documents**

Be sure to put the individual person's name, date of birth and address at the top of each paper document described here if it isn't already there (in case some of the papers get lost or separated).

- A Copy of Your Family Emergency Plan or Plans
- Official Government Non-driver ID Card or Driver's License
- Birth Certificates for All Family Members
- Immigration & Naturalization Records
- Citizenship Records
- Green Cards or Work Visas
- Passports
- Insurance Policies (all insurance policies on anything you value)
- Adoption Papers
- Custody Papers
- Marriage License or Certificate
- Divorce Papers
- Court Records including any Orders of Protection
- Auto Registration, Insurance and Title
- Auto VIN (Vehicle Identification Number)

- Photo of your Car and your Car's License Plate
- Medical Insurance Cards
- Social Security Cards
- Social Security Records (SSI and SSD<sup>8</sup> Award Letters, Surviving Spouse Benefit Records, Social Security Retirement Records, Railroad and Military Benefit Records, Black Lung Records)
- Bank Account Numbers & Bank Names and Addresses
- Credit Cards & Bank Contact Information
- ATM Debit Card and Pin Numbers
- Savings Account Numbers and Bank Contact Information
- 401 K Plan and Contact Information
- Stocks and Bonds
- Credit Cards with Contact Information (for each card if lost)
- A Copy of Any Wills, Trusts or Estate Documents
- Business Licenses, Insurance Documents and Records
- Copies of Educational Diplomas or Training Certifications
- Copies of Profession Related Licenses
- Copies of Work Resumes
- Copies of Employment Benefit Records and Contacts to Call
- Pension Plans and Contact Information
- Military Service Records

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<sup>8</sup> SSI is Supplemental Security Income. SSD or SSDI is Social Security Disability Income and is based on work earnings.

- Military Service Related Disability Records
- Copies of Home Purchase Records, Mortgages or Refinance Records
- Copies of Land Leases or Property Purchases
- Copies of any Land or Property Surveys
- A Copy of Your Property Tax Records
- A Copy of any Home Security System Codes or Entry Codes
- A Document with Safe Combination Numbers
- A Copy of Your Apartment or Home Rental Agreement or Lease
- A Copy of Your Renter's Insurance Policy (if you have one)
- Inheritance Records
- Copy of Any Pre-Paid Funeral Plans
- Copies of Death Certificates
- Copies of Court Will and Probate Records or Decisions
- Deeds to any Cemetery Plots You Own
- A List of Passwords to Email and Internet Sites You Might Need

**Tip:**



**ALWAYS CARRY A PENCIL SHARPENER IN YOUR BAG OR SURVIVAL KIT. IT CAN BE USED TO SHARPEN STICKS FOR USE IN ARROWS OR GIGS AND THE SHAVINGS MAKE AN EXCELLENT TINDER FOR FIRE STARTING.**

**\$ Priority 5: Cash & Checkbook 9**

The amount of cash you might want or feel you need to carry is very personal. How much money would you need to survive for 3 days to cover food, transportation, rainwear or emergency purchases? Add that up and save it up to use when an emergency is threatened. Some people hide cash in their homes where they can easily get it. If you have no problems opening things, some companies make fake soup and Spam cans you can use to hide money in. For the DIY (Do it Yourself) people, there's a photo frame idea we have for you on the next page.

**Hide Your Cash "Do it Yourself" Photo Frame**

**Priority 6: Physical Copies of Your Keys**

-   Home, Apartment or Vacation Properties
-   Cars, Boats and other Vehicles
-   Farm and Garden Equipment
-   Lockboxes, Safety Deposit Boxes, Vaults and Knox Boxes
-   Fireproof Safes, File Cabinets and Boxes
-   Mailboxes

Remember, we have included the need to have physical copies of keys so that you have them all in **ONE PLACE** (in your emergency binder or on a **SEPARATE** special key ring that is attached to your binder or your "Go Bag") ready to go when an emergency happens or an evacuation is in progress.



**Pet Emergency Plans Are Needed:** Don't forget to include planning for your pets in all types of emergency situations! You can get a *Pet Emergency Planning Kit Checklist* by calling, writing to or sending an email to NCCI (the North Country Center for Independence).

<b>Priority 7: Digital Records, Photos and Files</b>
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- Digital Records:** Store the digital files, copies of documents and photos on a USB Memory Stick or Flash Drive that you can put on a key ring with your emergency keys, tuck into a binder pocket in your emergency binder or put on a lanyard or chain to wear around your neck.
  
- ☞  **Family Photos:** (the pre-digital era photos are the most precious and irreplaceable. Start thinking about scanning or having a service scan and preserve your photos in a digital format that you can load (or have them load) onto your USB Memory Stick.
  
- ☞  Copies of ALL of the Paperwork in Your Emergency Binder (digital photos or files)
  
- ☞  Photos of Valuable Household Items (digital photos)
  
- ☞  Photos of Valuable Electronic Items You Own with Serial Numbers, Model Numbers, Insurance or Protection Purchases and Date of Purchase (digital photos or files)
  
- ☞  Photos of Fine Jewelry along with any Appraisal Records (digital photos or files)
  
- ☞  Photos of Your Prescription Medication Bottles

- ☎  Photos of Antiques and Collectible Items along with any Professional Appraisals you have had done (digital photos or files)
- ☎  Warranties or Guarantees you have on any item you value (digital photos or files)
- ☎  A Copy of Your Family History or Genealogy Records (digital photos or files)
- ☎  An Inventory of your household possessions on a list (digital files)
- ☎  A well lit video of your home inside and out to show condition and possessions (digital video or files)
- ☎  A List of all valuable items stored outside (farm equipment, boats, garden tractors, snowmobiles, mowers, statues. Include photos, serial and model numbers, insurance paperwork, warranties or guarantees and any appraisals you had done (digital photos or files).

Photo courtesy of FEMA



## Making the Family Emergency Binder

Choose the papers, files and other items that apply to you from our lists included in the book to make your binder.

Putting all of this paperwork in an emergency binder that is placed where you can easily see it, grab it and go is a crucial part of your plan. If you want to go a step further, think about putting the whole binder in a large, clear plastic zipper bag to keep it dry and safe from the elements.

You could even stash the binder and your extra keys in your "Go Bag" (or "Bug Out Bag") so you can grab everything from one place and go.

Make sure that everyone knows where your family meeting place is at home and when you are away traveling together. Choose a family meeting place for both home and travel locations because, if you ever get separated, everyone in the family will know where to go to meet up.

If something happens and you get separated and one of you can't make it to the meeting place, be sure that every family member is always carrying their emergency ID and contact cards that **INCLUDE** the address of the family meeting place. This means that you will need to print out and make your Emergency ID and Contact cards for your travel destinations **BEFORE** you travel or as soon as you arrive at your hotel or vacation spot

## Planning Based on Your Greatest Risks

1. Determine What Your Greatest Risks Are Based on Location (or travel destination): Based on where you live, determine what your greatest risks are (like power outages in the winter or during extreme heat). If you are living in a rural area, you may be cut off from food supplies, gas, water and even roads in bad weather.

2. Talk with Your Family (or neighbors if you live alone): In the family talks, you can reduce anxiety and fear by talking about how you all, working together, can manage and survive any emergency. Talk about who will do what kinds of tasks and jobs to help.

3. Assemble All the Things You (if living alone) or Your Family Will Need: By now, you know the basic tools, foods and types of clothing you might need. Talk with your family about where everything is kept and make sure it's always within reach quickly. Check and test anything you buy BEFORE you do a practice drill so that you will know it's ready and it works for you.

4. Have a Family Discussion about Practice Drills  
When you have your family talk, everything is ready to go and you can show your kids, roommates or community partners in safety where everything is and how it works. Make the final decisions about who does what job and then

set a date for a drill or pick a person to call a surprise drill. Kids love this job!

5. **MAKING DRILLS WORK for KIDS:** Kids need to know that the drills are a serious matter, but you can help them reduce fears by doing an arts and crafts day to mock up the emergency you are going to practice drilling. Let the kids draw pictures of high waters or cars floating in the roads for a flooding drill. On drill day, the kids can kick off the drill by hanging their pictures and sounding the warning to the family.

6. **Drill Day:** Emergencies can happen with little to no warning. Drill day should be the same way. Someone in the family (or you, if you live alone) will be the person to sound the alert. You can either let the kids kick off the drill by hanging pictures and warning everyone or one adult can pretend that you've heard an evacuation alert, weather warning or other emergency alert. Be sure that you have made plans for each kind of emergency that would be common or likely to your geographic location. When the warning or alert is sounded (for any specific emergency that you want to practice and drill) by either an adult or the kids, it's time for everyone to start doing their jobs. The "Island of Peace" person needs to make sure that no one is rushing, but calmly doing their task or job and following the steps of your plan for the type of event you are drilling and practicing.

**7. After the Drill: What Worked and What Did Not**

When you're doing your practice drill, probably everyone in the family will have something to say about what it felt like for them. Ask questions of the whole family about what worked and what did not work. Or, maybe your talk will be about what did not work as well as you had hoped it would. What do you need to do to improve things? Write down what you need to work on or things you need to purchase (or fix) to try another drill.

**8. More than One Drill for More than One Type of Emergency:** Most people that have watched the news, in the past few years, know that we have had unusual weather events frequently. In the southern states, there have been six "once in 100 years" hurricanes in recent history. Knowing this, it's smart to prepare for events that could impact your area harder than normal.

Practice for weather, fire, health emergencies, natural disasters (like an earthquake or flood) and crime related events. Talking about all of these things with your kids, your partner, your neighbors or just with a friend if you live alone will help you to work out a plan for all things, then practice each plan in a drill.

 **Emergency Drills for:  
People with Disabilities**

People with disabilities need to do all of the same steps in the assessment of your skills, strengths and weaknesses as well as planning your own ways to work with those strengths and skills in spite of any areas of weakness or difficulty.



Adapting new ways to do things is one skill that most people with disabilities have already mastered. Once your self assessment or family assessment is done, create your plan and set a date for a drill.

**Solo?** If you live alone, plan a drill day and go ahead with the drill whenever you decide to kick it off (even if you're not feeling well or do not feeling like doing it).

An emergency can happen when we do not feel well and doing a practice drill on a difficult day will help you to anticipate any needed adaptations. You will also probably feel surprised and happy about your strengths (in spite of how you feel). Going ahead with a planned or surprise drill will allow you to learn what needs to be adjusted in your plan so that your plan can work even on your worst day. This can help you to zero in on areas where you need to have a different strategy or get different tools.

Imagine any kind of emergency event that could happen and work out a plan for how YOU can manage it. Do a practice drill for every type of emergency even if you have to do them all alone.

This can create a sense of control, calmness and also spark your creativity in the ways that you can adapt the things you have (or adapt yourself) to help you in that specific type of emergency event.

When you live alone, it is so important to make your plan with anyone who might live near you (that is interested) that could be in the "same boat" in an emergency, but never thought about doing a practice drill. This can even spark friendships and social opportunities as you get to know your neighbors. And, you might just be responsible for saving someone's life by helping them or getting them to think ahead, prepare and then make their own plan.

Notifying close friends, people in your faith community or any neighbors about your strengths, skills, needs and weaknesses can help you to get back up assistance, when needed, because people will be informed and ready. And, it may offer you the chance, one day, to help someone else with the skills you have to offer and the things you'll learn by planning, practicing and doing your drills.

We have some excellent "Supplemental Materials" from a variety of sources that can help you to do your own self skills assessment, learn more about making plans specific

to your disability and help you to "walk through" the ideas of practice drills and how to do them alone or with other people. You can ask for those materials by calling or writing to the North Country Center for Independence (NCCI). Call NCCI at 518-563-9058 to request any materials of interest to you.

 **Special Communications** 

Special communications of some type may be needed in any type of emergency. There are types of communication that would be good for everyone to have in their "tool box" and some types that you may never have a need to use, but knowing a few things about them could save the day if you needed them.

**Emergency Registries**

First, some communities have a voluntary emergency registry for people with disabilities and senior citizens. If your community has this type of registry, consider signing up so that people will be aware of where you live and what you might need in a weather emergency, natural disaster or other unexpected event. Ulster and Steuben County in New York have emergency plans for people with disabilities and a registry that you can voluntarily choose to use or not.

FEMA has information about registries nationwide that you can learn more about from NCCI by calling, writing or sending an email.

If your community does not have this kind of voluntary registry, you might want to take the lead in helping local officials get one started.

### Getting Attention: SOS in Morse Code



We have already discussed using a flashlight or flashing light to get attention when you need it. In the daytime, using the flashing function on your flashlight will be seen more clearly than plain white light. At night, it's your choice of whether to use steady white light or a flashing light.

If you want to add a very special skill to your toolbox, you can learn the code to spell out "SOS" with your flashlight or with short and long sounds. The dots on the chart below represent a short burst of either sound or light. The lines are for a steadier, longer version of sound or light.



For the deaf, learning Morse Code is one more way you could communicate in an emergency. Just learn one "word", like SOS. For the history buffs reading this book, SOS was

first used in the early 20th century to send the message: "Save Our Souls". To save time in an urgent situation, it was shortened to SOS to express an urgent appeal for help.

SOS in Morse Code is three short bursts of sound or light, three long bursts of sound or light, then three short bursts for the last "S". It would look like this:



**S                      O                      S**  
 ■ ■ ■                      \_ \_ \_                      ■ ■ ■

Short, short, short then: Long, long, long: then Short, short, short.

### Hanging Signs and 3D Signs

There are some 3D (three dimensional) "pop out" distress signs that say SOS that you could use at home or when you are traveling in a private vehicle. They are inexpensive, lightweight and easy to use.

We have already talked about emergency flags, usually colored a bright orange (the same color construction crews use). Some of these flags are just plain orange and others have "Help" or "SOS" printed on them. You can use these flags day or night. Move them to get attention on the roadside or in your home in front of a window. Take one with you when traveling in any vehicle so you can signal a need for help for yourself or for others, Some of these come on a flagpole and others have no pole.

The flag with the rope is so lightweight, it is easy to fold and put in your purse or a backpack to have if needed. If you drive or have a boat, it's a good idea to have one of these flags in each vehicle. Keep one at home too.



## Sirens and Alarms



When a storm threatens or a flood, you may hear sirens from wherever you are (home or traveling). An emergency siren that signals a need to evacuate, a coming wildfire, a hurricane, tsunami or tornado will sound different than what you might be used to where you live.

When traveling, prepare for possible emergencies in advance by asking the locals or emergency officials what kinds of likely emergencies can happen in their area. Ask them about warning sirens or bells so that you can be as

prepared as the locals are to evacuate to a safe place when you hear one.

The top five states that are most likely to have an emergency event or natural disaster may surprise you. Texas is number one followed by California at number 2, Oklahoma at number 3, New York at number 4 and Florida at number 5. In New York, we need to take emergency planning as seriously as states like Oklahoma in "Tornado Alley" and Texas and Florida which are frequently hit hard by hurricanes.

1. Texas
2. California
3. Oklahoma
- 4. New York
5. Florida

### Priorities: What Do I Do First?

Give yourself a year to get through all of this and start slow and small. Get your 3 day emergency "Go Bag" ready first along with your important medical documents and special identification materials. Then, you can prepare a small purse or backpack kit that will fit into a 1 gallon plastic zipper storage bag, a bottle or a small zip cloth bag. The purse or backpack kit should go everywhere you go (outside your home or your room when staying in a hotel), every time you go ANYWHERE. If you drive, the next thing to do is to prepare an emergency kit or bag for your car.

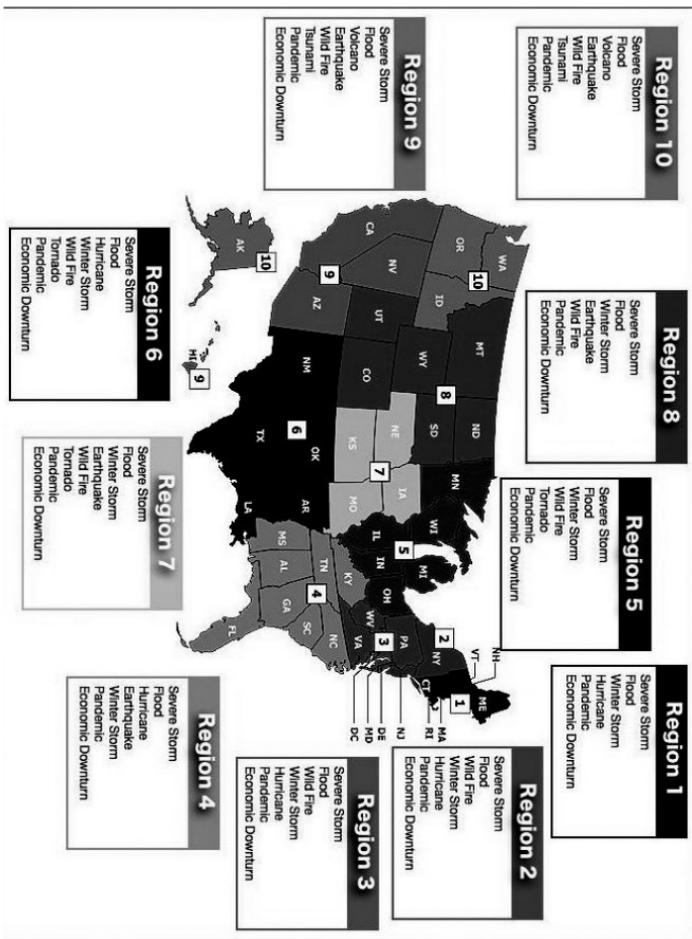
## Travel Priorities: Do Your Homework!

Prior to traveling, take some time to review the most likely risks (of any kind) that you could encounter where you are going. Take some time to prepare a travel emergency plan to make sure you know where to go, what to do and what to pack.

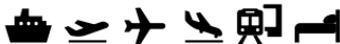


FEMA has created a chart showing what types of risks are most likely in different regions of the United States. A color version of the chart on the next page is available if you ask for one (Photo and chart, courtesy of FEMA).

## FEMA Chart of Risks by Location



## Emergency Planning Away From Home



We could find ourselves in an emergency situation outside of our home in our own community or in some place that we have traveled to see.

Emergencies can even happen on the road when we are using a professional medical transportation van or car. They can also happen while we are riding in a public transit bus, boat, train, plane or when riding somewhere in a private car.



Story:

### Van Breakdown Leads to Heat Stroke

We had a client who had an emergency happen last summer when a medical transportation van broke down on the side of the road on a hot 90 degree summer day. The client, another passenger and the van driver were stuck on Interstate 87 for 4 hours because they could not get a cell phone signal to call for help. People in cars were driving by them as if they were fine without stopping to assist. The driver had done everything he could to flag down people down for help, but no one had stopped. Both passengers were not feeling well and the heat made them feel worse. One passenger had two bottles of water, but had shared one and had one to drink.

There was no shade where the van broke down and neither passenger was able to take a long walk to try to find some shade in that blazing heat. Finally, the driver was so worried about the passengers that he walked over a mile to try to get a cell signal. When he got a signal, he called the State Police. They responded within 25 minutes and called an ambulance for one passenger. That passenger was suffering from heat stroke.

That journey was a 3 hour trip heading North from Albany, NY towards home in the Plattsburgh, NY area. In this case, one passenger was well prepared for an emergency by carrying two full large bottles of water, a sandwich, a hat, sunglasses and a light jacket; all of those things were not enough to prevent the heat stroke.

This story shows us that, sometimes, even the best preparation can fall short in an emergency situation.

If someone had stopped to help them when the driver tried to flag down assistance; things probably would have turned out very differently. If someone had stopped, the driver could have asked them to make an emergency assistance call right away (if their phone could get a signal) or asked them to call for help as soon as they could get a signal.

**← The Rule of Three**

**This gives us the chance to talk about "The Rule of Three" (attributed in history to United States Air Force survival training).**

**The "Rule of Three" says that, in an emergency situation, we can live for three hours without shelter, three days without water and three weeks without food. That hot, 90 degree day, when no shelter from the sun could be reached nearby, the driver and passengers were at risk even though they had water and food. It was over 4 hours before the driver decided to walk to try to get a cell signal. It was another 20 to 25 minutes before the state police were able to get there to respond.**

**The driver probably kept thinking that someone would stop, as he kept waving his arms to flag someone down. He should have made the decision after 1 hour with no assistance to walk somewhere to try to get a cell phone signal. This would have gotten emergency assistance there, most likely, BEFORE anyone had heat stroke.**

**After that experience, that driver's company did make a new policy for vehicles having an emergency breakdown. They decided to have drivers walk away from broken down**

vehicles, when they couldn't get a cell signal, within 30 minutes after the breakdown occurred.

This was a smart policy change because it would keep all involved more safe. The driver would be less tired from waving his arms for assistance in the heat and could reserve his energy to walk where he could get a cell signal. The passengers would not be exposed to such extreme heat or at a high risk of hypothermia if it was a winter breakdown.

**Rule of 3: We can live....**

⚡ 3 hours without shelter

⚡ 3 days without water

⚡ 3 weeks without food

**But we can only live 3 seconds...  
Without HOPE.**

For survival, hope is the most powerful force and tool in your toolbox.

People experienced with survival training know that hope is the most powerful force and tool we have in surviving any emergency. If we do not have hope, we can lose the will to survive.

Preparing, as best as we can, for any emergency increases our chances of survival because we will have the things we need and our practice will help us to stay calm. Being strong is a mindset as well as a readiness skill. We get the strength to fight to survive from having hope. We also get strength from the confidence we build with readiness preparations for emergencies.

**Rule # 1: Hope is your most important Survival Skill.**

**Rule # 2: Being strong is a mindset as well as a readiness skill.**

**Rule # 3: Remembering the "Rule of Three" will keep you alive.**



**We get stronger from the confidence we build with readiness preparations for emergencies.**





For your toolbox, add together:

The intangible idea of hope.

The measurable idea of building the combined strengths of mind and readiness.

The practical ideas of finding shelter, water and food.

This will create a new set of ideas, skills and practices that apply to our daily lives and to any emergency events we experience.

Being strong is a mindset as well as a readiness skill.

Do your planning and preparations at a pace that works for you. Let yourself work gradually over a year to try things, buy things, plan things, prepare and do practice drills. Start your planning for the season of the year that you are in or for the season that is approaching so that some of what you might need to learn or do will be in place if there's a big winter storm or a terrible heat wave.

### Rule # 1: Hope is your most important survival skill.





## Thinking Ahead and Carrying What You Need



People that do outdoor sports know that "Travel light, but carry what you need" is a critical motto or mindset. Outdoors is often the first place where we "land" when an emergency happens. Steady, ready, go!

But, what you need to carry depends on how long your trip is and whether you're traveling under your own power (on foot or in a wheelchair) or traveling in a vehicle. You don't have to travel as light in a car, van or bus as when you are walking, wheeling, crutching or using a cane to make your way from point A to point B.



**Key Tip:** Carry what you can or what the vehicle you are in can hold to be as prepared as possible for anything. Delays on the road can turn into emergencies depending on weather conditions and your own health issues.





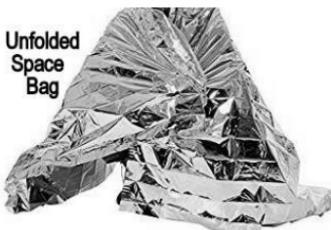
## Finding What You Need

Look through sporting goods, camping, hiking and climbing stores, websites and catalogs to find the lightest weight things you could use to meet your needs to carry water with you in a quantity that can last your entire estimated travel time whether walking or in a vehicle. You should take the temperature into consideration. You'll need more water to drink on hot days than on moderate or cold days.



**Key Tip:** If you are not a fan of drinking water, carry a beverage you do like that is caffeine free. Caffeine has properties that can dehydrate you (make you thirsty). Staying hydrated (having enough water in your system) is critical. Juices, caffeine free iced tea and Gatorade are good choices as well as some other flavored drinks.

Unfolded  
Space  
Bag



Bivvy Bag Folded



**Emergency "Space" Blanket & Bivvy Bags ★**

Shop in auto, sporting goods stores, camping and hiking stores or on the internet for Bivvy bags and "Space blankets". A space blanket looks like aluminum foil, but it's very flexible and smooth. It, like a Bivvy Bag, reflects 90% of your body heat back towards you. It takes up a tiny amount of space, when folded, and it is very lightweight. Use it under your own blankets or inside a sleeping bag to really keep warm. It can also be used to shield you from the sun if you get stuck somewhere in very hot weather.

**Bivvy Bag**

An emergency Bivvy Bag is a good item to carry in your backpack, car or carry-on luggage when traveling. A Bivvy Bag is a very lightweight type of sleeping bag that usually has a bright orange outside nylon fabric with an inside made of the reflective space bag type material. When it's rolled up, it will fit in the palm of your hand. Crawl inside of one and your core body temperature will work with the blanket to keep you warm.

Bivvy Bags will reflect 90% of your body heat back to you which will keep you warm in very cold conditions. If you travel with loved ones, Bags come in sizes for one person or for two people to share.

## Emergency Flags

Another important and lightweight item to carry is a plain bright orange fabric flag in nylon or some other durable fabric. This can be hung from your wheelchair or held in your hand to flag down help when needed. Some stores carry flags, banners or sunshades that have the words: "Call for Help" or just "Help" written on them. They are lightweight, fold down to a very small size and this means that most of us could find a place to carry one. This small item should be carried whether you are "on foot" or in a vehicle. Find these flags in sporting goods, biking, auto, boating, camping & hiking stores or on the internet

## Tips and Reminders

### Emergency Action Plan

- Stay calm!
- Check for injuries. Call 911 for life threatening injuries only. Otherwise, do not use the phone.
- Locate emergency supplies and flashlight.
- Turn your portable radio on and listen for instructions.
- Wear protective clothing

 Don't Leave Home Without These

Find and carry the following items no matter where you go or how close by your destination is because an emergency can happen at any time.

1. One or two lightweight but very durable beverage containers filled with water or a caffeine free drink that you like (Hydration = Safety).
2. A Space Blanket or single sized Bivvy Bag (if you're out alone).
3. A bright orange plain fabric flag you can wave to seek help or direct traffic or a bright orange flag type of sign that has the word: "Help" or "SOS" written on it.
4. A Flashlight (with the flasher and the whistle combination 3 in1). This can be used to see, be seen, signal for help or to communicate.
5. A personal alarm or something that helps you make noise.
6. Your fully charged cell phone with your ICE contact already on the phone. Load your phone with other important contact numbers.

**7. Wear a Medical Alert bracelet if you have any allergies, implants, or conditions that would require immediate special attention.**

**These items will easily fit in a quart or gallon sized plastic zipper bag. Don't leave home without them and then regret it! The weight you carry, if you're moving under your power (even in a power wheelchair) is very important for your wellness and safety. Travel light, but carry what you need.**



**Hot Days & Cold Days  
Emergency Survival Tips Outdoors**

**If you find yourself in an emergency situation, it's difficult on any day no matter what the weather. If you're not wearing the right clothes for the climate you're in and carrying the basic items you need for survival, it's potentially life threatening if you are stuck outdoors. Since emergencies can happen at any time, anywhere, be sure you are wearing clothing that are appropriate for the weather in the area.**

**When it's Cold Outside**

⊕ Reduce your body's heat loss by getting out of the wind, off the ground and remove any wet clothing. Cuddle together with other people or your pet for extra warmth.

⊕ If your clothes are wet, put on dry, insulated clothing (if you have some) and then, find or make yourself some shelter. Pay special attention to keeping your head, neck, and torso warm and protected.

⊕ Build a fire BEFORE you get cold if you think you'll be outdoors all night. Gather extra wood for the night.

⊕ Drink your water (heat it up, if possible and add in a few dissolved hard candies or sugar for some flavor if that's all you have).

⊕ If you have food, eat high-energy foods (cereal, bread, granola bars, trail mix) throughout the day.

⊕ Get to know the terrain of the area and make a place to sleep (shelter yourself with pine boughs or newspapers if you don't have a space blanket or Bivvy Bag) and lay down something soft (cattails are good as well as dry leaves) to create a barrier between you and the ground early before it gets dark.

⊕ Rest and conserve your energy unless you are performing vital tasks or exercising to keep warm.

⊕ Maintain a calm and positive attitude. Hope is your number one survival skill.

⊕ Be prepared to signal rescuers at all times.

When it's Hot Outside

⊕ Reduce heat exposure: get out of the sun and off the hot ground (especially hot pavement or hot rocks) and find some shade.

⊕ Wear light-colored, loose-fitting clothing. Pay special attention to shielding your head and neck.

⊕ Wear a hat with a brim (or make a hat with newspaper or a piece of clothing) and cover your neck with a scarf or some paper, wear sunglasses, if you have some.

⊕ Wet your clothing if water is abundant.

⊕ Don't do strenuous, heavy lifting types of activities during the heat of the day. Reduce your movement to conserve strength and move when it's cooler later in the day or evening.

⊕ Drink your water! If water is plentiful and CLEAN<sup>9</sup>, force yourself to drink until your pee is “clear.” Clear urine means your body is fully hydrated.

⊕ Get familiar with the area and terrain early. Make camp or your bed site before it gets dark, even if you plan to do work or move around during the night when it’s cooler.

⊕ Rest to conserve your energy.

⊕ Maintain a calm, positive attitude.

⊕ Be prepared to signal rescuers at any time.



On hot days or very cold days power wheelchair batteries can lose their charge far more quickly than on moderate temperature days. Keep this in mind when you make plans to go somewhere. New users of power wheelchairs can make the mistake of thinking that you are safe to drive your wheelchair a few miles on a hot or very cold day. If you run out of power and you are not near anyplace where you could charge your battery (if you were carrying your charger); you are in an emergency situation when the batteries go dead.

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<sup>9</sup> Clean water is critical. Request Supplemental Materials for ways to purify water in urban or wooded and rural settings.

**Travel Light, but Carry What You Need**

**When traveling in a vehicle, you have the opportunity to carry whatever would be appropriate for your needs if you were delayed by traffic, your vehicle breaking down or an accident for hours. Keep in mind that, if you are traveling with other people, they need space for what they may need too, so again, travel as light as you can. Hydration (something to drink) and nutrition (something to eat) are the most important things besides wearing proper clothing<sup>10</sup> for the weather conditions inside of or outside of the vehicle.**

**Food for Travel**

**Carry food and drink that will not get spoiled in the heat (peanut butter and jelly sandwiches travel well and won't spoil). If you're allergic to nuts, consider traveling with some cheese in a small cooler or some ready to eat summer sausage and crackers. Some fruits, like apples, oranges and grapes travel well and are sources of sugar and hydration.**

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<sup>10</sup> Rule of Thumb: Wear clothes appropriate for the weather that will dry quickly or keep you warm even if wet. Carry a season appropriate hat and pair of gloves, sunglasses and a jacket or sweater (season appropriate).

If you are stuck in traffic in the heat with no air conditioning, roll the windows down and **GET OUTSIDE OF THE CAR**, as needed, to get the cooler outside air around you.

**\* GET OUTSIDE OF THE CAR 🚗  
You're Cooking in That Oven!**



A car is like an oven in hot weather. Being stuck in traffic that is not moving is dangerous if your air conditioning is not working. Temperatures inside the car can rise to 120 degrees or higher in minutes if the windows are up. If you don't have air conditioning in the vehicle you are traveling in or if it is not working, windows need to be rolled down and you need to try to get time for breaks outside of the vehicle if the traffic or your vehicle is at a standstill.

**⇒ Cooling Tips ⇐**



**Key Tips:** Water to drink and to pour on a cloth you carry with you can be a life saver in hot weather. If you don't have air conditioning and can't get to a cooler place in the shade anytime soon and you feel faint or overheated, you need to get your body cooled down as best as you can.

Take a small dish with a tight fitting lid with you with the cloth tucked away inside it. Pour a little water into the bowl and wet the cloth to put on your face, neck and chest to cool down. Don't throw that water away, if any is left! Save it to use again.

If you are going to be traveling in your own vehicle, consider taking an insulated cooler with you that is filled with ice or with ice packs that you freeze, then carry. Put the cooler in your trunk and don't open it unless you need it for drinks or food you're keeping cool. Opening it as little as possible will keep the cold inside so it's there if you need it to cool down in an emergency.

Of course, if you can get a cell signal, you should call for help if you continue to feel faint and overheated. Emergency personnel will do everything in their power to assist you even if the traffic or accident conditions slow them down. This is where practicing ways to stay calm can also help you to save your health or save your life.

Lastly, remember that:

**"Sometimes, we are the only help".**





**Key Tip:** Thinking ahead, being prepared and practicing for emergency situations can help you stay calm when they happen and help you to problem solve the situation to save yourself.



**Key Tip:** Think "outside the box"

Coming up with new ways to use ordinary things you have with you or that you find is a key skill set that can "save the day" in emergencies. Help yourself develop this skill by trying to think of different things you could make from everyday items in your home or car to help you in an emergency (or to help you with an everyday kind of problem solver).



Create and "craft" things that you might have done as a child to build (or remember) those "make it myself" skills. For example, think of new ways to use what you have. If you don't have a hat, can you make one from the newspaper in the back seat of your car? If you don't have a coat or an emergency blanket with you, what do you see around you (if there's no building or place of shelter) that you could use to wrap around you or get under or into to stay warm?



**Cold Weather Survival Tips  
During Vehicle Emergencies**

- ✱ Do not leave your car unless it's in the middle of a traffic lane.
- ✱ Call for help, wait for help and put up your flag or flares.
- ✱ Text for help if you can't get a cell signal (texts often work).
- ✱ Put on your sweater, jacket or get in your Bivvy Bag if you feel cold.
- ✱ Put your hat & gloves on (or wrap up in your Space Blanket) and curl into a ball to conserve body warmth.
- ✱ Stay calm, think positive and take sips of water or bites of food.
- ✱ Stay away from moving traffic while you wait.

**Important Reminders****FIRE**

- Get out and stay out of burning buildings (or cars)
- Alert neighbors if safe to do so
- Carry damp towels
- Dress in cotton or wool pants, long sleeved shirt, goggles, and gloves.
- Only fight fires less than 3 feet tall



### **Critical Tips for the Mobility Impaired**



For people in wheelchairs that cannot ambulate on your own at all, this particular set of tips applies ONLY if you can't get a cell signal or the driver of the vehicle you are in can't get a cell signal or a radio call out for help when you're stuck in hot weather traffic for hours (due to an accident or a vehicle breakdown).

1. People in wheelchairs that are strapped down in a commercial vehicle like a bus or a medical transportation van need to SPEAK UP about getting outside of the van or bus if you feel faint, sick to your stomach or confused no matter what amount of time it takes. All of these things are possible signs and symptoms of dehydration, heat exhaustion or heat stroke. Get out of the vehicle to try to cool off no matter what amount of "bother" that you think it might be to the driver. It could save your life if there is no air conditioning and you are stuck in traffic or broken down on the side of the road for hours.

2. Ask another passenger to speak to the driver for you if you can't get his or her attention. Time is critical in order to get you cooled down before your body temperature goes too high.

3. Once you have the driver's attention, be clear that you don't feel well and you need to get off the vehicle when he or she can safely find a way to do that. Ask him or her to radio or call for help if they haven't already tried and ask them to keep trying since cell phone and radio signals can go in and out and may work one minute, but not the next.

*If the driver seems unwilling to help you or find a safe way or place for you to exit the vehicle, then be ready to make statements (Make some noise!) about what the driver might face if harm were to come to you or any other ill passenger.*

4. The driver is responsible for all passengers' safety and well being. He or she **MUST** work to find emergency help for you or a safe way and place for you to exit the vehicle. The driver, when safe to do so, must also seek help from other passengers or nearby drivers to try using their cell phones to see if they can get a better signal to call for help. The driver can also ask them to help get you out of the vehicle. To try to prevent any of this, it is critically important that you carry whatever you can think of that could help you keep cool.



#### Cold Weather Tips

Cold weather is dangerous for any human being that is not dressed properly for the weather. It's not a good idea to ever entertain the thought that "It's just down the street, I don't need a coat." People do think this kind of thing and they, with or without a disability, are endangering their welfare

and safety. If you are not able to stand and walk, it's more than risky, it's potentially life threatening.

Let's say you use a wheelchair, but, you're going down that street you are so used to with no coat on at top speed. The day before, a truck dropped something heavy that hit that curb cut that used to be smooth and perfect, but, now it's a broken mess. But, you don't know that if you're sailing down the street at top speed and hit that curb cut before you realize that it's broken! You tip over and can't get up.

Traffic goes by you like nothing has happened (usually because they can't see you when you're down that low). No one else is out on the sidewalk in that exact moment. You're screaming for help but all of the houses and businesses have their doors and windows closed. And now, you're so low down on the ground, it's even hard for pedestrians to see you until they actually get close to you (especially if there are snow banks all around you).

That "just down the street" trip to the convenience store  with no coat on now has you in danger of getting hypothermia (a dangerous drop in your core body temperature) or even being hit by a car.





### TIP FOR EVERYONE:

1. Dress for the weather including a hat and gloves. A hat and gloves are critical for wheelchair users in every season. Even if you don't wear them, take them and have them within easy reach on the front of your chair. Caps or straw hats and tight fitting work or biking gloves for the summer are best. Warm mittens or gloves and a tight fitting, wool or thermal synthetic hat are best for the winter.

2. It's a pain, but in extreme weather  (very cold or very hot) carry your power wheelchair battery charger with you. Get a small case for it that you can slip over your headrest or put it in a plastic shopping bag inside another plastic shopping bag that has handles big enough that you can slip it over your headrest. Don't be shy, if your battery is running low, stop into the nearest public building or business and ask for some help. People usually want to help, when they can, so get comfortable wherever they want you to go and sit still for at least one hour so you have enough juice on your battery to either get you to a bus or back home.

 When you get this kind of help, don't forget to write down (or remember) the address and send (or hand deliver) them a thank you note. Thank you notes are another lost courtesy, but they are always appreciated.

 **Travel Tips For the Deaf and Hard of Hearing**



For the deaf, traveling close to or far away from home when an emergency, accident or vehicle break down happens can be very complicated. If your cell phone is low on a charge or you can't get a cell signal to get help communicating with needed emergency services. In addition, there are only a few counties and a couple of cities in New York State that currently have text to 911 capability. It looks like the State of New York is planning to have statewide text to 911 by 2020, but that doesn't help anyone today.



If you happen to be traveling in Vermont, you will be all set, the entire state is set up for text to 911 already. This is why "advance scouting" of the places you are going to travel to is so important. It helps you to know what is available to assist you and will help you to figure out ways to use some other plan or alternative means of communication when you need help.

When your car is broken down on the side of the road or when another type of emergency happens on a public transit vehicle; communicating with the hearing people you encounter can be a big challenge if you are not prepared.



1. A good idea for any person is to carry an extra, fully charged cell phone battery (in case your battery runs low) that you can easily put in by yourself. Keep that extra battery WARM inside your car or in a pocket in your clothes or IT WILL LOSE its CHARGE (from the cold). Use the cell phone, with your warm, extra battery to text what you want



to say while a hearing person can stand by and read it.

2. Carry a small pad of paper and a pen or pencil. This basic set of two tools can allow you and any hearing person to talk back and forth to make a need known or make a plan for the situation.

3. Idea!   In advance, make some "Communication Cards" (like flash cards) that can communicate some basic ideas and needs to hearing people. Put them on a ring and store them in your glove compartment or in your car emergency bag or kit. Take them everywhere with you when traveling on public transit (bus, train, boat or plane).





4. If you are traveling on a public transit type of vehicle, these "back-up plans" for communicating are even more essential. Other people on the bus, train or plane could be in a panic if there's been an accident or a long delay. Think about being the "Island of Peace" person in these situations. The more that you project calmness and confidence, the calmer other people will be around you. You will need them to be calm enough for you to communicate what you need.

5. The driver, train engineer or pilot is responsible for all passengers safety needs. Your alternative forms of communication need to be delivered to the driver, engineer or pilot as quickly as possible if you are having a personal medical emergency. Don't be afraid to use a flag that says "Help" to get attention if you can't get the needed attention any other way.

6. In public transit, in a breakdown or accident situation, you may be physically okay but, it's still smart to let the driver, engineer or pilot know that you are deaf or hard of hearing as quickly as possible. Do this in case something changes suddenly and you need help or can offer help to someone else (any kind of help like first aid, "Island of Peace person", interpreter).

**Travel Tips For the Blind**

For the blind, it's easy for emergencies to happen to you while just walking around your own neighborhood. If construction work is underway, but the crew is not making any noise or has stopped work for the day and hasn't put up any audible warning signs or signals, you could easily fall right into a hole.

1. Some towns and cities do notify citizens, on their websites, about any and all ongoing construction, even on sidewalks. Check out your city's website before you leave to walk anywhere.

2. If the website doesn't have these notices, call the town or city in advance to ask where any construction is going on before you leave. Call on Fridays if you plan to be out and about on the weekend. Find out what's under construction, if it's being worked on over the weekend and how it's being blocked off, ramped, if it has a detour or if there's any giant holes in sidewalks with no audible warnings where you might be wanting to walk.

3. If you're ready to speak up, ask your city or town to purchase audible warning signs and signals that would warn you and others that a hazard was ahead. Your city or

town is responsible for obeying the ADA or Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Audible warnings are required by the ADA at construction sites or hazardous areas.

4. If an emergency happens while you're traveling on a public transit vehicle (bus, train, plane, boat), many people would not instantly understand that you are blind. If you were asked to evacuate the vehicle, you could get hurt by other people pushing you if they were in a panic. Plan ahead for this possibility by displaying your white cane throughout your trip and be sure to speak up if someone tries to make you move before you can do that safely. Ask for help.

5. On a train, plane or bus, you can request, in advance, not to be seated near any emergency exits. This kind of request can give you time to mobilize your thoughts while other people are evacuating from the vehicle. It will also keep you away from anyone that is in a panic that could push you before it's safe for you to move.

6. If you need assistance to evacuate the vehicle safely or for a personal medical emergency, don't hesitate to speak up and say what you need. Get the driver's attention or get a message to the driver with help from another passenger.

7. If other passengers are in a panic, stay as calm as possible and think about what to do before you do anything or move. Stay put for a minute or two and sort things out in your head. If the need to communicate with the driver is critical and other people can't or won't help you, don't be

afraid to speak up or hold up your "Help" emergency flag. The driver is responsible for your safety and will either hear you speak up or see your flag. The driver is required to give you whatever assistance is needed.

  Travel Tips For  
People with Mental Health Diagnoses



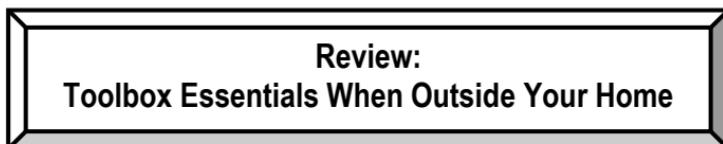
**Key Tip:** If you have anxiety, post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or any other mental illness, the need for communicating how and what you're feeling is elevated in any emergency. It's a good idea to practice imagining emergency situations and then thinking of things you could do to help yourself calm down and communicate whatever you need **BEFORE** you take a trip.

1. Do you know what kinds of things trigger your anxiety or symptoms? Listing them and working out plans that would help you to deal with those triggers on trips, even short walks around your neighborhood, will help you to feel like you have more control and readiness for whatever happens.
2. "Advance scouting" (checking things out ahead of time by asking friends, an independent living center or a local service organization) can help you to understand what you might encounter on any trip (near or far). Knowing what you can expect can help you "problem solve" any issues in advance or come up with ideas to make your trip easier.

3. Some people get comfort from holding a small object that can comfort them or ground them in staying focused on the practiced travel plan.

4. Take something to do (book to read, knitting, games) with you that you can focus on and enjoy to help you keep your mind centered, calm and ready to enjoy your trip and your destination plans.

3. The driver is responsible for all passengers' safety and well being. If you are having a personal medical or mental health emergency, the driver **MUST** work to find emergency help for you or a safe way and place for you to exit the vehicle.



Find and carry the following items no matter where you go or how close by your destination is because an emergency can happen anywhere at any time. These items can usually be carried easily in a purse or backpack, are lightweight and take up very little space. We have found that they can all fit into a quart or gallon sized plastic zipper storage bag and tucked into a purse, pocket or backpack.

### **Travel Toolbox Essentials**

- 1. A travel plan ("advance scouting" makes this possible).**
- 2. One or two lightweight but very durable beverage containers filled with water or a drink you like (per person).**
- 3. A space blanket or bivvy bag (per person)**
- 4. A bright orange plain fabric flag you can wave to seek help or direct traffic or a bright orange flag type of sign that has the words: "Help" written on it that you can put in a vehicle window or hold up to seek assistance.**
- 5. A Flashlight (with the flasher and the whistle)**
- 6. A personal alarm, whistle or something else that helps you make noise (if you don't have the flashlight & whistle combo in number 5).**
- 7. Your fully charged cell phone with your ICE contact already on the phone (extra battery if the temperature outside is very cold or very hot).**
- 8. Wear a Medical Alert bracelet if you have any allergies, implants, or conditions that would require immediate special attention.**
- 9. Hope**

 & Avoid Being a Crime Statistic  



In big cities, people using wheelchairs can be victims of a special type of crime where someone will tip you over (or try to), then steal your wallet, purse or completely pull you out of the chair and take your chair. People in power wheelchairs are at the greatest risk of having their wheelchairs stolen because there is a huge market for them.



### Tips for Everyone

To reduce the risk of this kind of crime happening to you, if you are traveling to a new area (in your city or away from home), get to know as much as you can about the area BEFORE you travel there. Know the streets, stores, public buildings and bus stops. Ask friends or an Independent Living Center (ILC) for tips about the safest route(s) to travel. Memorize, when possible, your path of travel from every arrival point to every destination.

If you can't memorize your path of travel, make notes on your cell phone so, when you read them, it looks like you're just reading a text message.

Try, as best as you can, to dress and look like (act like) the locals wherever you travel. If you look like you fit in, like you are familiar with the area... you are always less of a target.

When you're traveling down the street in any "new to you" area, keep your eyes up and moving all the time. Look down to check the sidewalks for safe passage, but quickly look up and make eye contact with people. If you are paying attention to everything going on around you and everyone you pass, it's harder for someone else to "get the jump" on you, surprise you or to see you as a target for a crime.



If you are blind, use your cane, your ears and your sense of the closeness of people or air around you to have a sense of when something is changing, when someone is moving by you slowly, quickly or pausing. Keep the cane moving around you even when standing still in order to show people watching you that you are alert to all that is happening around you, when it happens.



**Tip for All of Us:** If someone does attempt to bump or push you, speed up and move along as fast as you can to get away from them. If they follow you, start yelling and get some attention. Yell whatever seems right to you, but, yelling "help" in a big city often makes people walk away or run away from you. Yelling "help" may not help you in a big city.



The Idea is just to YELL to make noise or even sing LOUD, LOUD, LOUD as you move fast. In some cases, just yelling "Coming through" or "Behind you" or "Excuse me" will make other people walking move out of your way so you can escape. Keep moving fast and in an unpredictable zig-zag pattern to stay ahead of and confuse the person pursuing you. Move towards crowds or public buildings and gathering places.

Making noise to draw attention to yourself makes you a less attractive target to someone thinking of you as, potentially, "easy prey". Thieves and other criminals do not want attention drawn to what they are trying to do.

If this happens to you and you continue to be followed or chased, get into a public building, that has a lot of people in it, as soon as you possibly can and call 911. As long as someone is trying to "catch up" with you, keep moving, but try to stay in that busy public building while you do the moving and wait for the police to arrive. Think about getting into train or bus stations, malls, a busy place of worship, a bank or even a police station if one is nearby.

If you have a personal alarm device, don't be afraid to use it, but, pick a place in the middle of a crowd to stop and push the button. It will make it harder for anyone chasing you to keep coming at you before you push that button.

A wheelchair, purse or drug thief wants to get your stuff as quietly as possible, this is why you have to make noise all the way through until help arrives or the person stops trying to chase you and goes away. Stay alert if you think they went away because they could be waiting for you to be in a more secluded place to try again.

The dirty truth about crime and thieves is that many drug thieves ASSUME that people with disabilities have valuable drugs, narcotics or equipment with them or on them. They will push you down or tip you over to try to get them from your bags, backpack, wheelchair, purse or fanny pack.

Some things are universal in avoiding becoming a crime victim. Others are unique to who we are and what we have as a character (or personality) trait or as a disability.

The way we become easier targets is when we LOOK LIKE we do not belong, look like tourists or look like we are not paying attention. The other way we can become targets for crime is if we appear to have a vulnerability that someone can use to their advantage.



**Avoid being a Crime Victim Tips:** Blend in with the "locals" to the best of your ability to LOOK LIKE a local. Study maps and memorize your travel routes (driving, on a bus or walking). Stay aware of who and what is happening around you.



For the deaf and hard of hearing, when you are in new places (at home or away), the same tips that we have given so far apply, but there's more for you. Be aware of your surroundings by *looking around often* enough to be aware of what people are near you and what places are near you that you could use to escape to or that someone could use to "hide in" and surprise you.



For the deaf (especially in big cities here or in any country), you have one way to "blend in" that may seem dishonorable to your disability, but, if you're traveling alone, it is very important to consider this. Across the globe, people are "plugged in" listening to music, podcasts etc. One way for you to blend in, in a new place, is to put earphones in your ears and walk along "jamming to your tunes". You will look like everyone else and can be more like the locals (looking like and being like the locals is a critical part of safety in new places UNTIL you know those places very, very well).



### **Tip for Everyone:**

Why do you need to think about all of this "blending in" stuff? Criminals notice the unusual or the "out of place" and use those observations to prey on possible victims. If you're deaf and you don't "jump" at a loud noise like hearing people would around you, that is noticed by someone

watching the streets for potential targets. With earphones in your ears, you would be written off as not hearing the loud noise because your tunes were turned up too much.

In truth, wearing earphones and not paying attention gets all kinds of people into troubling and targeted positions for being possible crime victims. If anyone has earphones in and they are walking on the side of the street near alleys, they are an easy target to grab quickly and pull into the alley to rob or do worse. Take note to walk on the side of the street where traffic is rolling and parked cars are between you and most of the traffic. When you need to pass an alley, look into it first and pass it when you can do so quickly, then get back onto the sidewalk near the traffic side.

Traveling with other people is almost always safer, but no guarantee, especially if your group is portraying a characteristic that someone might see as a vulnerability.

For example, in New York City, panhandlers (a beggar) and wallet snatchers can pick a tourist out from 100 feet away. Tourists are usually looking up and, if with other people, they are talking together excitedly, looking at maps or brochures. Then they "bunch up" while they make decisions about where to go and what to do.

Here's a tip for every traveler, with or without a disability. Memorize your path of travel from the location where you arrive to your hotel. If you need "crib notes" or reminders,

put them on your cell phone so it looks like you are simply reading a text message.

Buy and look at city street maps before you travel to a new place. Know all of the side streets off the main ones you might have seen when checking Google maps.



Another idea is to take screen shots or use a snipping tool on your computer to "cut out" pictures of Google maps (or ask someone else to do this for you). Snap close up pictures of maps of the areas and neighborhoods where you will be traveling. Store those photos in a special folder on your cell phone or keep them in a notebook (printed out and pasted or stapled into the notebook). Once again, when you stop to look at these types of maps, you won't look like a tourist. You will look like you're reading your notebook or checking something on your phone.

### Close up photo of a neighborhood in Albany, NY



Check your maps before you get off the bus, train, boat or plane or get out of your car in the parking garage. Memorize everything you possibly can. Observe the behavior and walking patterns of locals and plan to mimic all of that to the best of your ability. Blending in is important to staying safe.

In New York City, few local people make eye contact and most look either hurried, worried or distracted with whatever they are texting on their phones or listening to in their headphones.



When you are traveling, you can't afford to be distracted, but you can "look as if" you are the distracted local to blend in and make up for reactions you would not be able to have as a deaf or hard of hearing person. Put your headphones in and proceed down the streets "jamming to your tunes" staying on the traffic side of the sidewalk as much as possible.



For groups of deaf and blind travelers, be aware that there are many distracted locals and tourists around you. People will probably bump into you accidentally (as well as on purpose) because they are not paying attention to what is going on around them. Staying aware and alert is the key to knowing whether that "bump" was an accident or attempt to steal something.



### Tips for Everyone:

Travel with "dummy wallets and purses" that you have in your pocket or on your arm that the thief can "bump and grab". Keep your credit cards, ID, cash and other important documents in a travel pouch (or travel belt) underneath your clothes. Have only enough cash within quick reach in your dummy wallet or purse (or in a separate pocket or coin wallet) that you use to pay for transportation, newspapers or items like snacks.

Go use a restroom to get extra cash out, when needed, from the pouch or travel belt and take only as much as you are willing to lose. If you want to make a large purchase with a credit card, again, go use a restroom to get the card out and hold it tightly in your hand or tuck it into your bra to make the purchase, then when the transaction is completed, go back to the restroom and put your money or credit card back in the travel pouch or belt. Many stores in big cities will gladly hold your bags for you at a counter, service desk or security station while you use the bathroom. Some will ask for your name and give you a "ticket" to pick your stuff up when you come back to the counter.



For deaf groups of travelers (or mixed groups traveling together), it's as important to stay away from alleys as it is for single travelers. It is too easy for someone to grab one member of your group and be gone before the rest of you even notice. To prevent this, do what many experienced

group travelers do, link your arms together when going down the street through crowds or by alleys. There is greater safety when you are linked together because you are a harder (and bigger) target to rob or bring down and you **WILL NOTICE** if there is an attempt to pull someone away from the group.



 **+** Going to the Emergency Room **+** 

Even when it's needed, most people do not want to go to the Emergency Room. In New York state, the length of emergency room experiences vary from fairly quick in some small hospitals to 8 hour (or longer) waits in cities. There isn't much privacy anywhere and people with disabilities often have needs that get ignored.

While there are plenty of laws on the books in our state and nation saying that we should get equal treatment in getting what we need, we often do not. To have the best emergency room experience possible, once again, takes some planning and work in advance and at the time you are in the Emergency Room.

Some of us will even need to do advance planning for rescue personnel to be able to get to us, to lift us or to transfer us onto a stretcher. They might need help to be able to communicate with us and take our needs and fears seriously. Don't worry, this planning and work can be done. You have a full toolbox of ideas, skills and practices now and you can do this. You are worth it!

At the Emergency Room, even more challenges can come up that we may not have had with the rescue people. On arrival, beside the triage (sorting out who needs help most) that the hospital staff will be working with you to do; you will have to make statements repeatedly about your disability needs.

Emergency workers are busy and distracted. In some hospitals, they wear a wireless "phone" type of device on a necklace where they can push a button and talk to each other. The use of these devices might help them, but it can be very hard for some of us to know when they are talking to us and when they are talking to someone on the device. The biggest hill to climb when this device is being used is being heard and being heard accurately (meaning they hear

and could repeat back to you what you just said). It can be very frustrating.

There was a reason you ended up in an Emergency Room. Either you (or someone else) called for help from your normal home, work or school location or you were in need of rescue from some emergency event that you could not have predicted. Either reason can cause anyone to feel afraid, anxious and traumatized. This makes you a 100% normal human being.

What can we do to make things easier even though we will have mountains to climb throughout the Emergency Room Visit?

We can do many things to get ready and to make communicating with emergency room staff go as well as possible.

Whether you're at home or away from home when the emergency happens, you can have your "MAD" (Medicine, Allergies, Doctors) lists **ready**, a short list of your diagnoses (illnesses, disabilities, physical or mental health conditions and any past surgeries) and a document you have prepared in advance that can talk about what you need to be as comfortable and as cared for as possible while in the emergency room.

  Important Medical Documents  

These documents are not required, but they can help you to get the best care possible. If your health is generally very good, in spite of any disability, there is less of a need to have these (with one exception  ) than if you have complex or complicated health issues.

If you have more than one diagnosis that is being treated regularly, you should consider choosing a document (or documents) that best expresses your wishes for treatment.



**Key Tips**



**Medical Proxy**  : Everyone, regardless of ability or disability, should appoint a Medical Proxy  . A Medical Proxy is a person who will make medical decisions for you if you can't. This person should be someone you trust and someone that will obey and follow all of your wishes for treatment. Choose your proxy person carefully. Have discussions with them about what you need and what you would prefer, then make sure they agree to follow what you have said.

In some states or other countries, a Medical Proxy might be called a "Durable Power of Attorney". These are names used for the same type of "assignment of the power of decision

making". Since a "Durable Power of Attorney"<sup>11</sup> can be used for more than just medical and healthcare decisions, be sure you know what you are filling out and signing BEFORE you sign it. It's a good idea to have a Medical Proxy or a medical "Durable Power of Attorney" because this will insure that someone who knows you and respects your choices will make decisions when you are unable to do so.

You will need to fill out paperwork to appoint your person to be your Medical Proxy . Your primary care doctor can help you to learn more about how to do this. You can also find help with this from a Legal Aid office, your local Office for the Aging and from some Independent Living Centers.

Disability Rights of New York should also be able to help you with this (518) 512-3448 (TTY) and (800) 993-8982 (Toll Free). They have offices in a few locations (Albany, Rochester, Brooklyn).

The North Country Center for Independence (NCCI) will have information about this on their website and you can call (518-563-9058) or email us to have the information sent to you.

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<sup>11</sup> A "Durable Power of Attorney" can also be done to make other decisions, like banking and financial decisions. Make sure that the only "Durable Power of Attorney" you assign someone to have is used ONLY for what YOU CHOOSE. It's all up to you.

When you fill out the Medical Proxy   paperwork, someone will need to witness you signing it. Then, they (the witness) will also have to sign it to PROVE that it was you that made this choice and picked your person. The New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) has Medical Proxy   paperwork that has two spots for witnesses, but, one is normally enough for most hospitals. It's your choice if you want to have one or two witnesses sign the proxy.

If you make out the Medical Proxy with your Primary Care Doctor, then it's likely that you could easily have two people witness you signing the document. And, it's helpful that they know who you are and what (and who) you want.

Give your Primary Care Doctor (and any other doctors that you regularly see) a copy of your Medical Proxy paperwork. Keep the original for yourself. Make a copy of your Medical Proxy paperwork for your emergency binder and for the small batch of paperwork you will carry with you when you're not home.



## Other Medical Documents to Consider in Your Planning

Every state has different laws about how any person can direct their health care choices if they are unable to speak for themselves. If you're traveling to another state or another country, it's important to know the laws where you will be going. What works in New York State will not necessarily be accepted in other states or countries.



**MOLST Forms:** New York also has its own ideas about what should and should not be done with medical directives (gives directions about your choices and wishes). The New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) has created a special form called a "MOLST" which is an abbreviation for "Medical Orders for Life Sustaining Treatment". It's a bright pink, cardstock weight (stiff like a postcard) form to fill out.



There are some hospitals and some nursing homes in New York that will **ONLY ACCEPT** the MOLST form as a legally binding (acceptable) expression of your wishes. This means that, once again, this is something to find out about in advance both in your hometown and wherever you might be traveling in New York State.

A "MOLST" form offers you the chance to fill out exactly what you would and would not want for treatment in a variety of ways. You can write in your own special needs, wants and instructions with the amount of time you might want (or not want) some kind of treatment to be done.

It is required that you work on the form with some doctor that you see. It could be your Primary Care Doctor or any other doctor that you regularly see. Each time you decide to update it or change something, it has to be discussed with a doctor and then you both will sign and date the changes.

MOLST forms are being used a bit too much in some hospital, nursing home and rehabilitation facilities. For example, if you were in a car accident and didn't have a MOLST or any other type of directives written down, a hospital patient advocate would probably offer to help you with filling out one.

Then, if you needed to be transferred from that hospital to a rehabilitation or nursing home facility to recover; those places often want you to fill out another "fresh" MOLST.

The choice to fill out or not fill out a new, "fresh" MOLST is ***completely up to you***. Stand your ground if you do not want to make any changes or simply do not want to fill out a "fresh" MOLST when the "old" one may only be a few weeks old.

Whenever possible, a MOLST form or another other medical directive (gives directions about your choices and wishes) type of form should be done when you are calm, have time to think and make your choices carefully.

Do not let anyone pressure you into filling out any forms or making any choices at a time when you are not ready to do that. This too, very intensely, points out the need for advanced planning. Advanced planning INSURES that your choices and wishes are respected and that you have had plenty of time to think about them, then make them.



### An Advanced Directive



Advance directives offer you the chance to give instructions about your health care choices and decisions. For instance, they allow you to choose when you do not want to be *resuscitated* (have artificial breathing or CPR (cardio pulmonary resuscitation)) done. They allow you to choose if you want to make organ or tissue donations. They give you the chance to be very specific about what you want or do not want or to just make a few statements that you feel are the most important.

The amount of detail or the lack of details in an advanced directive is completely up to you. One caution, though, is to be very specific about things that are super important to you. For example, if you do not want to be intubated (have a tube put down your throat to help you breathe) or put on a respirator; then it's very important to state that in your advanced directive.

*It's equally important to state every life saving or life lengthening treatment that you might want to have doctors provide. *



In the community around us, some people have thoughts and feelings that they would never want to be disabled permanently. These thoughts and feelings even occur in doctors and other healthcare workers. This can affect the recommendations they might make and treatments they might offer or NOT OFFER. This is a reality that we must face and be prepared to deal with as we receive care in any doctor's office, hospital, emergency room, nursing home or rehabilitation facility.



To protect our full freedom of choices and options for treatments or choosing not to be treated; we need to write down both what we would want to be done to help us (or save our lives) and what we would not want done.

For example, do you want to have CPR (massage of your heart to get your heart beating again if it stops)? Write that down if you want it.

Would you want to be put into a medical coma if that might give your body and brain enough rest and relief from pain (from an accident, illness or other condition) that you could slowly and quietly get rest and recover?

A medical coma is usually done by giving you drugs. A needle will be put in your vein (IV or intravenous needle) with a bag hung that allows the drugs to drip into you). This process can allow your body to sleep, get rest and enough relief from pain or injury that you recover more quickly or with less pain. If you're willing to go into a medical coma or have any other life saving measure made to save you, then write down everything you are willing to do. Your doctors can help you with this by teaching you about life saving treatments and helping you sort things out. By doctors, we mean the doctors that you see regularly.



Why is this "writing everything down" so important? Our lives, the lives of people with disabilities, are just as important and just as valuable as any other person's life. It is our choice and our business to make decisions about what we want or don't want. No one has the right to allow their opinions, fears or feelings to get in the way of offering us all of the same treatment options that would be offered to other, more able bodied people (or to younger people). Stand your ground about what you want and put it in writing so that no stranger ends up making decisions about your care that you would not want.

Make the choices you want. Make the choices you want. Make the choices you want. This is another "Rule of Three".



"Living Will" is an older name for what we call "Advanced Directives" today. It was the same kind of document where you wrote everything down that you wanted or didn't want, but, it was a form used, mostly, by older people.

Since a life threatening emergency can happen to any person of any age, most states and other countries came up with the idea of "Advanced Directives" in order to allow any person of any age to think about and write down their

choices before anything ever happened. The exceptions to this are children that are not at the "age of consent" or other people who have been determined to be unable to consent to treatment or to refuse treatment.

An advanced directive or a MOLST is a very smart thing to work on, when you're ready, to protect your rights and choices at any age or stage of your life.



**👤≡ Do Not Resuscitate (DNR) Orders:** One of the choices you can make, if you are legally considered old enough and able to consent (agree to do or not do something), is not to be resuscitated (brought back to life if your heart or breathing stops) by having CPR or other life saving "extraordinary measures" done to save your life. If a doctor agrees that you are legally and mentally capable of making this kind of choice; then the doctor writes the order when you direct him or her to do so. This can be done when you go over your MOLST form or your Advanced Directives, with your doctor, if your doctor agrees that it is a well thought out choice (then the orders will be written). You can change your mind, at any time, as long as you are capable of speaking about or writing about the choice to change your mind.

**Make sure to let your doctor know if you have any second thoughts about DNR orders and have those orders stopped until you are 100% sure that it is what you want.**

**Remember, you can change your mind about any of this paperwork, at any time. You will have to reach out to your doctor to make any changes, but, it's worth it and you are worth it....in order to have things the way you want them.**

**Emergency Room "Must Have" Documents**

**Emergency Room visits are hard. They are even harder if you have to be there alone. The most important thing you can do to help make sure you get the help and support that you need is to make sure you always carry a list with the names, phone numbers and addresses of anyone you would like the hospital to contact.**

**The great thing about having a friend or loved one along with you in your emergency room visit is that they can help you remember things, get things for you and cheer you up. It's a lot easier to hold on to hope when you have company.**



**Something New**  
**Your "Who I am and what I need" Statement**



**Create a "Who I am and what I need" statement to carry with you in your travels outside your home and to any emergency room. This is something every human being needs to think about doing since hospitals and emergency rooms can make you feel stripped of who you are. Sometimes, we even lose things we need like our wheelchairs, hearing aids, phones and other helpful devices.**

**People with disabilities have unique needs that can be unknown or ignored if information about them isn't given right away. Even though we have separated this topic into some sections for specific disabilities, every section has things that can help you, no matter what your disability is, and even if you are not disabled!**

**Please read every section to get ideas and tools for your toolbox and your emergency room safety plan. All of it can help you brainstorm about what you need and what you need to prepare.**

**Who I Am Tips for the Mobility Impaired**

If you normally use a wheelchair for mobility, you will not be able to take your chair with you in the ambulance. That means that, upon arrival at the Emergency Room, people might rapidly assume that you could walk. Or, they could assume that the issue that is causing you to look or act like you can't walk or feel things is a **NEW TRAUMA** or illness.

Emergency Room staff need to know right away if you can't walk or have limited abilities to walk, stand, turn or respond to a physical examination. I use a wheelchair and I can't tell you how many times I have asked for help to go to the bathroom in an emergency room and I have been told: "It's right down the hall on the left." That has happened even when I have repeated that I can't walk several times to several people **AND** have also had this written on my statement document and in my medical paperwork.

If you have any kind of mobility impairment that will cause you to need help if you don't have your wheelchair, walker, cane or crutches with you in the emergency room; speak up right away. Speak up as many times as you need to and don't be afraid to **MAKE SOME NOISE** or **CRY** if people are not listening to you.

It is inhumane to make you wait hours for a drink of water or for some help to use a bathroom. If you don't feel well enough to speak up, insist that your family or friends are called and ask them to help you get your points across and your needs met.

If your family and friends can't come to you right away, hand your "Who I am and what I need" statement to the staff or doctors as many times as it takes for them to read what you have written about yourself and your disability (or any other) needs.



### Who I Am Tips for the Deaf

Communication is hard for everyone at the emergency room, but, arriving as a deaf person, is even harder. It may be hard to get the message across that you need an interpreter. Rescue workers or the people that check you in, at the Emergency Room, may not wait for you to get out your phone or a notepad to write down what you are trying to say to them. They are in their "zone" and that often means that they are not paying enough attention to any effort to communicate.

If you are asked questions and do not respond, a doctor could think your failure to respond was related to a stroke or other brain problem.

It is critically important to have YOUR statement document on the top of your paperwork so emergency room staff will, hopefully, find an interpreter as soon as possible, find a video interpreter or find an alternative way to communicate with you.

You can have a statement at the top of your document that will ask for the immediate assistance of a patient advocate. An advocate is able to devote more time to finding an interpreter or an alternative way to communicate than emergency room staff.

Now, let's get real, if you are deaf and were in an auto accident, you might not be able to use one or both of your hands. You can prepare for this possibility by writing something in your "Who I am and what I need " document asking for the advocate to come and immediately find a communications board to help you communicate with doctors and staff.

A communications board is usually going to be brought to you by a physical therapist. Physical therapists are not on duty around the clock (or on most weekends) at most hospitals. But, if one is on duty, the board will have pictures or pictures with words that communicate simple concepts like:

1) Do you have pain? (This might be shown in a picture with a painful "face" or a yes or no written out that you can point to)

- 2) Where is your pain? (They will ask you to point to your body or to a picture that shows a body).
- 3) How bad is your pain? (They would have you point to a number or a face that expresses the amount of pain.)
- 4) Are you thirsty?
- 5) Do you need to use the bathroom?
- 6) Can we call someone for you?

When using a communications board, things move slowly. Do whatever you can do to respond. The therapist might ask you to nod, blink, shake your head or wiggle your toes in some way if those are the things that you can use to communicate. Many therapists have only rarely used communication boards. They could be as new at using this type of communication as you are. Some hospitals may have flash cards for communication that talk about the same simple types of questions.

Anything you can do in advance, in writing, to think about what you want, what you need and who you might like to have called to be there with you will make your emergency room visit far less traumatic and frustrating.



Who I am Tips for the Blind or Visually Impaired

The first thing that happens when you arrive at an emergency room is that someone wants your insurance card and wants you to read and sign forms.

Most of the time, it might be easy for you to locate your cards when things are normal, but in an emergency, even if you have your wallet or purse, you may be too shaken to be able to find them. Once again, you are 100% normal if this is what happens to you.

Everyone is nervous in an emergency room. The small print on so many forms is impossible to read, but you have the right to know what those forms say, to have someone read them to you and then have someone help you to find the right place to sign when you're ready.

Your statement about being blind should also be on the top of your paperwork so that no doctor will examine your eyes and misinterpret your normal condition as part of why you came to the emergency room.

You too, may need assistance, finding your way to a bathroom or to the water they may have left near you. Speak up, as many times as you need to, to get your points and your needs across to the staff and doctors. Don't be afraid to make some noise if the help you ask for is being ignored for hours. Say what you need. Make some noise, CRY or change the tone of your voice enough that they "get it" and pay attention to you and what you need.





## Who I am Tips for People with a Mental Health Diagnosis

Probably the biggest barrier to overcome when you have a mental health diagnosis is to get medical professionals to stop blaming everything you feel physically on your mental health status. It's a giant hill to climb that can really add to your level of frustration, anxiety and ability to communicate. It's very hard to keep communicating about what is going on when someone cuts you off and makes the assumption that it is "all in your head".

Every possible reason for your symptoms or pain should be ruled out before any person jumps to conclusions. This is your human right. Claim that right by speaking up about what you need and what brought you to the Emergency Room. Ask the hospital to call your friends, family or a trusted community advocate if you feel you need assistance in getting your medical needs properly treated.

In your statement about "Who I Am and What I Need", make it clear that you have a physical body and that your symptoms should not be thought of as a mental health issue until all possible physical reasons are ruled out.

Doctors "rule in and rule out" various types of potential medical problems by asking questions and performing tests. It's a tool they use to narrow down the amazing number of possible things can cause the same symptoms.

For example if you feel sick in your stomach, it's possible that you ate something that did not agree with you or other possibilities include things like: a heart condition, an inner ear problem, the flu or a bug, a head injury or even a migraine headache.

It's good that doctors ask a lot of questions and do tests to narrow things down to the most likely problem. Then, they might try a treatment or might decide to "watch and wait" while telling you to see your primary care doctor as emergency room follow up.

### The Dreaded "Watch and Wait"



Very few people could say that they know one single person that has not been frustrated when the emergency room or their doctor decides to "watch and wait". When you don't feel well, you want help and want to feel better quickly, not six weeks or six months from now.

If, in your heart, you believe there is something very wrong that the doctors are missing, this is a time when you need to gather your shield, toolbox, the best advocate you know or best buddy you want by your side and make a plan to get attention to the problem.

It is not a time to shy away, get depressed or be paralyzed into taking no action. You are the person who knows your body better than anyone else in the world. Trust yourself and take action with the plan you make even if it means seeing your family doctor more often and any specialists she or he might refer you to for more insight.

**Prepare yourself  
Get your tools together  
Write things down  
Think ahead  
Be confident  
Be Ready  
Be Safe**



This is important. You are good enough and you are **WORTHY** of any and all work needed to assist you anywhere in the world, but especially, in healthcare. You are good enough, important enough and needed just the way you are. Write this down, memorize it, say it and state it out loud when you need to, to remind someone else that this is the truth. Speak up and make your case, because, sometimes, we are the only help.

Sometimes, **WE** are the only help. Speak up for your value, your life, your hopes and dreams. Speak up. Just take that first step.

Taking Charge of Your Wellness & Safety  
With the Rules



**Rule 1:**

**INSIST** that the emergency staff take and read ***all of your paperwork*** that you bring with you or that you may already have stashed in your purse, pocket or backpack.

The Emergency Room staff will want to see your medical documents first, but, you might want or need them to see your "Who I am and what I need" statement first. If that's the case and you feel like your medical condition is stable enough, put your statement document on top of what you hand them or on top of your stretcher. Ask the rescue people to pin or clip this statement to your clothing so it can't be missed.

**Rule 2:**

**If you feel fearful about your medical status**, give the emergency room staff your medical paperwork immediately and have the statement document on the bottom of the pile. Save your energy when you feel fearful, but when you have the strength and inner calmness, be sure to insist that the staff read your statement about your disability needs.



An idea about one way to have this paperwork ready is to have it all stapled together with the "Who I am and what I need" statement on top. You or the staff can easily flip that page to the back to read all of the rest of your medical paperwork

**Rule 3:**

**DO NOT RELY ON YOUR MEMORY FOR ANYTHING!**

Your life depends on the accuracy of all information and it depends on people **READING** that information. When you put these documents together in advance, you can do it slowly over time. You can talk to your Doctor about things you might not remember or have trouble spelling. Write everything down and have it ready to go and easy to find wherever you want to keep it at home. Put it in a place where a rescue worker could quickly and easily locate it if you can't physically get to it.

**Rule 4:**

**DO NOT LEAVE HOME WITHOUT THIS PAPERWORK!**

Even if you're only making a short trip to a convenience store, anything can happen, at any time. Have a second set of your medical paperwork that travels with you at all times. Fold it up and stick it in your purse or a pocket.



The best way to make sure everyone understands that the paperwork is yours and does not get a chance to mix it up with something else (or someone else) is to have your full name, date of birth, address, phone number and emergency contact person (your ICE contact) at the top of every page. None of this has to be typed, but, try to print neatly if you don't have a computer. Someone you know might be willing to type it up for you.

### Organizing Your Medical Paperwork

Put your paperwork together alone and with the assistance of your doctor or people you trust. If you have appointed a Medical Proxy, you should discuss all of your paperwork and wishes with him or her.

#### **First Things First**

Put your paperwork together in the following order to get the best chance at having your voice and needs heard to stay safe and healthy.

1. Your "Who I Am and What I Need" statement should be on top of all of the other lists you can prepare ahead of time to improve your experience in the emergency room or in any unexpected circumstance or event.

2. The next thing in your paperwork should be a list of all of your current medications, inhalers, eye drops, shots you take for any illness at home, over the counter drugs (like Pepto Bismol or cold medicine), any vitamins you take and any illegal drugs you use (and how often you use them). Remember, your honesty about all of this could save your life or contribute to your death.

3. Your list of any allergies you have to medications foods, dust or pollen or any chemical or environmental allergies. If you want to be really detailed and help out your care provider, write a sentence or two about what happens to you or what your reactions are to the allergens.

4. A list of all of the doctors that treat you regularly along with their phone numbers (and addresses if you want to add that).

5. A list of your current diagnoses. This means a list of all of your disabilities if you have more than one, chronic illnesses and any other medical or mental health conditions that a doctor has determined you have.

6. A list with the names, phone numbers and addresses of anyone you would like the hospital to contact. Be sure to let them know who has your medical proxy, if you have appointed someone to do that for you.



**What's in your toolbox so far?**

**We started this book with the idea that the first thing you need for health, wellness and safety is hope.**

**We went on to talk about the realities and barriers everyone faces in getting medical care and communicating.**

**We acknowledged that, as people with disabilities, we face some extra barriers that can cause or contribute to us feeling discouraged and frustrated. The way out of this is to figure out what is not working, then use skills you already have and skills you can learn to practice new ways to handle things.**

**We learned that planning is one of the biggest things we can do to preserve and protect our health at home, in community emergencies, when traveling or when getting ready to go the emergency room.**

**We understood that using the power of our imagination was a very important tool to help us work out different ways to try things to help ourselves. We also need to use the power of our minds and imagination to calm ourselves when we are in a traumatic situation that would cause anyone to be fearful.**

**We learned that practicing ways to remind ourselves to turn inward and find ways to calm and soothe ourselves will help us whether we are experiencing a frustrating situation or a**

very dangerous event. Being able to feel like we have some control is going to give us a chance to put thinking ahead of feeling fear in the event of an emergency. It can also put thinking ahead of anger, in those times when the barriers we face, cause understandable anger and difficulty in getting our needs met.

We came to know that action is the remedy we need to give ourselves the best chance, in getting care and staying safe, in the event of any type of emergency. Action can also help us to stay busy enough so that it is easier to remain calm while we work through the steps of our emergency plans.

We explored ways to prepare for our travels and to protect ourselves when traveling.

And, WHEN WE SPEAK of TRAVELS, we mean anytime you leave your home. Don't leave home unprepared.

***“He or she, who is best prepared can rise to accomplish the needed goals, meet and surpass the biggest challenges and enjoy the most blissful moments of inspiration.” - Debra A. Buell***

Everyone at the North Country Center for Independence is glad that you have chosen to read this little book. We hope, that it is a tool that helps you in your times of greatest need and inspires you in your times of greatest challenge. Thank you for taking this journey with us!



Prepare yourself  
Get your tools together  
Write things down  
Think ahead  
Be confident  
Be Ready  
Be Safe

**“Be prepared not scared.” – Peter Kummerfeldt, "Surviving a Wilderness Emergency"**

**“The more survival skills an individual has that have been practiced physically and otherwise, the better odds they have for those skills coming to the forefront during a stressful emergency.” – Cody Lundin, "98.6 Degrees, The Art of Keeping Your Ass Alive"**

**“Survival – in its fullest sense – is our most basic instinct. It is a way of life, a way of thinking, a way of living that enhances everything you do, and prepares you for whatever uncertainties of life may bring. True survival is not narrowly selfish, greedy, racist, or hateful. Real survival is giving, expansive, inclusive, and loving...” – Christopher Nyerges, "How To Survive Anywhere"**

**“The more you know, the less you have to carry. The less you know, the more you have to carry.” – MORS KOCHANSKI (Author of "Bushcraft")**