

Hurricane preparedness has many similarities across communities and individuals. Individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may present unique needs in a mass care setting. These strategies have been compiled to assist emergency shelter staff to ensure successful interactions while supporting individuals with ASD.

Environmental Strategies

Visual Cues:

- Identify shelter staff and volunteers
- Post shelter rules and expectations
- Label rooms, areas, and materials
- Use directional arrows and signs

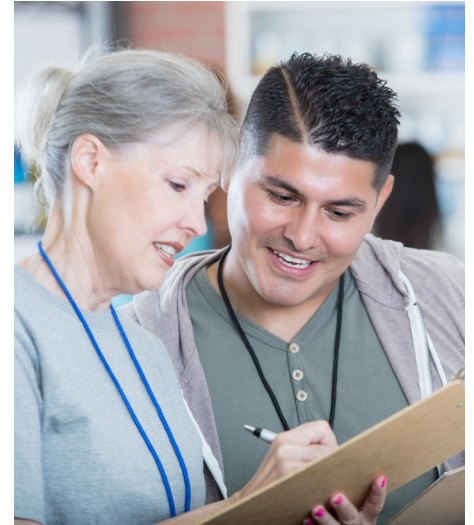
Create Spaces:

- Provide access to quiet space
- Design a sensory space for periodic use
- Provide furniture, carpeting, and lighting that supports sensory needs
- Outline personal spaces with tape, string, furniture or other visual barrier
- Offer spaces that are away from exit door to reduce elopement



Communication Strategies

- Clear, simple instructions
- Use visuals to support verbal communication
- Stay calm and be patient
- Allow the individual time to respond
- Provide access to power for electronic communication devices
- Post a schedule and explain any changes
- Use a social experience story
- Use the *Communication Card* provided



Behavioral Strategies

- Define rules and expectations for behaviors
- Provide sensory kits, headphones, sunglasses
- Minimize wait times
- Identify and support caregiver break times
- Take cues from the caregiver
- Allow individuals to bring comfort and support items



Individuals with ASD may prefer to use a visual tool to communicate their needs and wants. Shelter staff and first responders can provide the visual below or a pencil and paper to support communication.

The communication board includes the following elements:

- Emotion Scale:** A vertical bar with 11 color-coded levels (0-10) and corresponding face icons.
- Keyboard:** A standard QWERTY layout with letters, a spacebar, and a back arrow.
- Response Grid:**
 - Row 1: yes (green border), no (red border), I don't know (person shrugging), I need help (hands raised), Not what I meant (red X).
 - Row 2: I like this. (happy face), I don't like this. (angry face), I need a break. (person lying down), I'm finished. (hands clapping), I want to stop. (stop sign).
- Numeric Keypad:** A 3x2 grid of numbers 1-9 and 0.
- Time Request Icons:**
 - Please wait here: person sitting at a desk with a clock.
 - I am here to help: person kneeling and offering help to another person.
 - How long?: clock face with a circular arrow.
 - minutes?: clock face with a red arrow pointing to the 12 o'clock position.
 - hours: clock face with a circular arrow.
 - days: calendar strip showing S M T W T F S A.



The Center for Autism & Related Disabilities (CARD) provides support and assistance with the goal of optimizing the potential of people with autism spectrum disorder and related disabilities.

<https://usf.edu/autism>

A Program of

