



Things to Think About!

Comfort Kits for Special Needs Children

By Linda Jorgensen

Providing children with the resources to stay safe on their own or in their classroom during an emergency is an invaluable asset to families and communities. Security threats, bad weather events, emergencies and other disasters can happen at any time. This can be particularly distressing, and problematic, for children with medical and/or special needs. Preparing our children for emergencies can help both parents and children stay calm when separated during an emergency.

Coordinate with Your Child's School Ahead of Time

For events happening during school hours it is best to coordinate with your child's school. Many schools have emergency programs and disaster kits already in place for the general population. Special needs children will most likely need more preparation to accommodate individual needs. Contact the school's main office to find out what emergency arrangements and plans are in place, if any. Talk to your child's teacher, as well, to see what rules are in place for what your child might bring, available storage space for kits and to make extra arrangements, as needed, for your child. Be sure to ask what type of storage container you'll need. Plastic storage containers with an airtight lid or a small back pack being the most commonly used.

Comfort Kit List

Each kit should include important basics like food, water, and a safe light source as well as items specifically needed by your child over a 24 hr. period. These items will be stored in a school approved storage container.

- High energy ready-to-eat, non-perishable (long shelf life) food items your child can tolerate or eat safely. Children who use a feeding tube for nutrition should have at least 3 meals worth of their individualized formula. Also include comfort foods that are your child's favorites and safe for them to eat.
- A sealed bottle of water (at least 16 oz.) or a supply of drinking water pouches.
- A safe light source such as a 12-hour glow stick or small flashlight with fresh batteries.

- A mini First Aid kit with any items your child may need specifically added.
- A small Mylar emergency blanket.
- Personal hygiene (bathroom) supplies.
- Small entertainment items such as a small toy, picture book, crayons, coloring book, travel game, etc. on your child's level that they may enjoy.
- A small stuffed animal for cuddling.
- A photograph of the family, family pet or significant others to hold on to.
- Family contact information. Parents, guardian, , etc. This could be printed on a small card and laminated.
- Specific supplies your child may need that are not already on hand.
- Medical instructions for school staff, if appropriate.
- Extra medication in a labeled, sealed container with specific instructions (Medications should be stored in a locked safe box accessible only to limited school staff such as the school nurse. Check with your child's school or teacher for specific school/classroom protocols.)

Be sure to talk to your child, on their own level, about what to expect if something occurs that will keep them at school for an extended period. Reassure them they will be safe and watched over and that you or another family member will pick them up as soon as possible.

Children with Autism often benefit from having a social story in picture form about such events. Keep one at home to review periodically as a family and a laminated copy in your child's Comfort Kit at school.

Preparing your child for possible, unexpected events and having supplies available for them will help them stay calmer, feel safer, and cope better until they can be reunited with family.