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الأشخاص ذوي الإعاقة
AUTHORITY OF PEOPLE WITH DISABILITY

Calm and Safe Together

A family guide to helping people with disabilities feel calm and safe in emergencies



2026

About this guide

Emergencies can be stressful for everyone. People with disabilities, children and adults alike, may face additional challenges that differ with each person's disability and needs. This guide offers families and caregivers simple, practical steps to help their family member with a disability feel calm and safe, and to prepare together.

In this guide, "your family member" means the child or adult with a disability in your family. The guide is part of APD's work to raise awareness of the needs of people with disabilities across society.

> **Important note**
>
> **This guide offers general guidance for awareness. When there is direct danger, follow the instructions of the official authorities first, whether that means staying in a safe place or evacuating. Then use the calming advice in this guide. The guide does not replace advice from doctors and specialists. Every person and every family is different, so choose what suits your situation. You know your family member best.**

How to use this guide

- Start with Chapter 1. Each chapter has simple steps.
- Before an emergency, prepare with Chapter 9. During one, see Chapters 6 and 10. Afterwards, see Chapters 8 and 11.
- Choose the tips that suit your family member's needs, abilities and way of communicating.
- Involve your family member, and ask what helps them.
- Boxes marked "Remember" hold the key messages.
- Emergency numbers are at the end of the guide.

In an emergency

Follow official instructions, move to a safe place, and stay together. If you notice danger, contact the emergency services straight away (emergency numbers are at the end of the guide).

Accessibility and easy reading

Plain language, clear print, strong color contrast, and text descriptions of pictures for screen readers.

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Chapter 1

Five things that help everyone feel safe

Experts agree on five elements that help people through hard times (Hobfoll and colleagues, 2007). Adapt each one to your family member's needs:

1. **Safety:** Stay together, keep daily routines where you can, and limit frightening news and images. (Chapters 4, 9 and 10)
2. **Calm:** Stay calm yourself, and use the calming methods that suit your family member. (Chapters 6 and 7)
3. **Connection:** Listen, communicate in their way, and keep in touch with family and friends. (Chapters 3 and 8)
4. **Independence:** Support them to do what they can and make their own choices. (Chapters 5 and 9)
5. **Hope:** Talk about the people who help, and remind each other that hard times pass. (Chapter 3)

Chapter 2

Understand what your family member may feel



Fear and worry are normal reactions to a frightening event. Reactions differ from person to person: some people react straight away, and others react later. Watch gently, and offer the support that suits your family member.

Common reactions

- Fear, worry or many questions.
- Trouble sleeping, or bad dreams.
- Wanting to stay close to family.
- Headaches or stomach aches.
- Crying, anger, or getting upset quickly.
- Jumping at loud noises.
- Less interest in usual activities.

Signs that may be easy to miss

People with disabilities may show stress in different ways, especially those who communicate without speech. Watch for changes from what is usual for your family member:

- Changes in how they communicate or interact with others.
- More repetitive movements, or changes to their usual patterns.
- Changes in appetite or sleep.
- Being more sensitive to sound, light or touch.

- New or stronger behaviors.

> **Remember**
>
> **Do not assume every change is part of the disability. It may be worry, and your family member needs comfort.**
>
> **When to seek help**
>
> **Respond with patience and understanding. If your family member hurts themselves or talks about it, contact the emergency services straight away (emergency numbers are at the end of the guide). If they lose skills they had, seek a specialist's advice (Chapter 11).**

Chapter 3

Communicate in your family member's way



Talking together helps you understand worries and offer reassurance. People express feelings through speech, signs, pictures, devices or behavior, so use the way that suits your family member.

1. Choose a good time and place

Choose a quiet time and a familiar place. Avoid worrying talks just before sleep.

2. Ask before you explain

Ask what they have heard and how they feel, then gently correct anything that is not accurate. Let them know they can come back to you at any time.

3. Use their way of communicating

Speech, sign language, pictures, gestures or a communication device.

4. Speak with them directly

Talk with your family member, not about them, and include them in conversations about their own needs.

5. Share the facts and reassure

Give short, honest answers that suit their understanding, and explain what you are doing to stay safe. It is fine to say, "I don't know."

6. Talk about the people who help

Such as paramedics, Civil Defense teams, doctors, nurses and teachers.

Tips for different needs

- **Deaf or hard of hearing:** Get their attention with a wave, or a light touch on the shoulder if they are comfortable with it. Face them, and use the way they prefer: sign language, writing or pictures.
- **Blind or low vision:** Say who you are, and describe out loud what is happening, for example: "We are going out now. There are three steps ahead."
- **Communication device users:** Keep the device charged and within reach, add emergency words to it, and prepare a picture board as a back-up.
- **Intellectual disability:** Use short sentences and one instruction at a time, use pictures and symbols, check understanding, and allow extra time.
- **Autism:** Explain what will happen in advance, with pictures if helpful, and give notice of any change.

Words that help

Avoid saying	Try saying
"Don't cry."	**"It's okay to feel worried. I'm here with you."**
"Nothing bad will happen."	**"Many people are working to keep us safe, and we have a plan."**
"Stop asking about it."	**"You can ask me anything, any time."**
"Be strong."	**"Everyone feels scared sometimes. We will get through this together."**
"There's no reason to be scared."	**"Your feelings make sense. Let's take a moment together."**

If they ask whether you are in danger, answer honestly and simply: "I don't know everything, but we are following the safety instructions, and I will stay with you."

Chapter 4

Help your family member feel calm and safe



Knowing what is happening, and keeping usual routines where possible, help people feel safe.

1. Stay close and connected

Offer reassurance in the way they find comforting. Ask before touching or helping.

2. Keep daily routines

Keep regular times for meals, sleep and usual activities. A picture schedule shows what comes next.

3. Make the space calm

Reduce noise and bright light, and keep their belongings and equipment in the usual places.

4. Limit frightening news and images

Take breaks from upsetting news and pictures, and rely on official sources.

5. Make time for what brings comfort

Favorite activities, such as play, drawing, reading or hobbies, familiar belongings and spiritual practices bring comfort and peace.

6. Share tasks

Involve your family member in tasks they choose and can do, such as packing their own bag.

Tips for different needs

- **Autism and sensory needs:** Use "first, then", for example: "First shoes, then your favorite item."
- **Blind or low vision:** Keep the white cane close, and do not move their belongings without telling them.
- **Physical disability:** Ask how they prefer to be helped or moved, and share this with the family.

> **Remember**
>
> **We do what we can, and the authorities do their part. Together, we take each day calmly.**

Chapter 5

Support at every age

Needs differ with age, abilities and understanding. The groups below are a guide only, so choose what suits your family member.

Children



- Use short, simple words: "I'm here. I'm taking care of you."
- Stay close at bedtime, and offer comfort in the way your child likes.
- Answer the same question calmly, as often as it is asked.
- Some children play out events, or go back to earlier habits for a while. This is common, so respond gently.
- Keep in touch with your child's school or center about any changes you notice.

Teenagers

- Respect their views. Talk during a walk or a car ride rather than a formal sit-down.
- Help them check facts and spot rumours on social media.
- Involve them in planning for their own needs and equipment.
- Notice long periods alone or big changes in mood.

Adults



- Involve them in decisions that affect them, and respect their choices.
- Ask what help they need, rather than assuming.
- Respect their privacy and dignity, especially in personal care.
- Include them in family emergency planning from the start.
- Older family members may need more time, and help with medicines, devices or moving.

Chapter 6

If your family member hears a loud or sudden sound

Loud and sudden sounds can frighten or upset some people, and reactions differ with each person's needs. These steps can help:

> **Safety first**
>
> **If there is danger, first move to a safe place and follow official instructions. Then use these steps.**



1. Stay as calm as you can

Speak in a calm voice and act steadily. This helps reassure your family member.



2. Offer closeness and comfort

Stay near, and reassure them with words, signs or other familiar means, respecting their preferences about touch.



3. Accept their feelings

Say: "That was a sudden sound. It's okay to feel scared. We are together."



4. Use a calming method they know

Such as a favorite item, a quieter space, or breathing exercises if they suit your family member (Chapter 7).



5. Return gradually to usual activities

Help them go back to something calm and familiar, such as reading or a hobby.

Adapting the steps

- **Deaf or hard of hearing:** Explain what is happening with signs, pictures or text.
- **Blind or low vision:** Describe where the sound came from and what is happening, in a calm voice.
- **Autism or sensory needs:** Offer noise-reducing headphones, use fewer words, and move to a quiet corner.

- **Intellectual disability:** Use one short sentence at a time, and repeat it calmly.
- **Physical disability:** Move to an interior room away from windows, with their equipment, and explain each step before you do it.

Chapter 7

Calming methods

Choose the methods your family member likes, and practice them together at calm times.

Belly breathing

- **1. Sit comfortably:** Put one hand on your belly.
- **2. Breathe in for 4:** Through your nose, filling your belly like a balloon.
- **3. Breathe out for 6:** Slowly, through your mouth.
- **4. Repeat:** 3 to 5 times.

The numbers are only a guide. Breathe at a pace that feels comfortable, and stop if the exercise feels uncomfortable.

For children: pretend to blow soap bubbles or a feather, slowly.

If breathing exercises do not suit your family member

- **Soft ball:** Squeeze it, then let go.
- **Slow counting:** Count together from 1 to 10.
- **Gentle pressure:** Press the palms together, or a hug if it is welcome.
- **Quiet space:** Noise-reducing headphones, or a quiet corner with soft light.
- **Something familiar:** A favorite item, picture or blanket.
- **The senses:** Name together five things you can hear or touch.
- **Movement:** Stretch or walk together, as they are able.

Chapter 8

Look after yourself and your family

Supporting a family member in an emergency can be tiring. Looking after yourself, and asking for support, helps you support others.

> **Remember**
>
> **Be a source of calm. Your family member takes their cue from you.**

For you

- Share your worries with a trusted adult, away from children.
- Make time for what helps you, such as prayer or a walk, and rest and eat well.
- Ask relatives or friends to share care, so you can rest.
- Agree who will provide care if you are not available.

For other family members

- Give each child some time alone with you.
- Explain their relative's needs simply, and let them help without making children responsible for care.

Chapter 9

Family emergency plan

Preparing ahead reduces worry and helps make sure your family member's needs are met. Make your plan together with your family member, so it reflects their needs and wishes.



1. Prepare a care summary

Write down medicines, health needs and how your family member communicates. Ask their doctor to review it.

2. Record important numbers

Family, doctor, school, workplace or center, and the emergency numbers, somewhere easy to reach.

3. Prepare identification and a way to ask for help

An ID card with name, recent photo, a contact number, needs and way of communicating. Make sure your family member has a phrase, sign or picture card that means "I need help".

4. Pack an emergency bag

Medicines, important papers, assistive devices, chargers and spare batteries, a picture board, comfort items, and headphones if noise is upsetting.

5. Plan for power and transport

If your family member uses electrical equipment, plan for power cuts, and arrange transport that suits them and their equipment.



6. Choose a suitable way out

Choose a way out of your home that works for your family member, including with a wheelchair, and practice it. Keep mobility aids within reach.

7. Choose a safe room

Choose an interior room away from windows that your family member can reach easily, in case the official advice is to stay inside (Chapter 10).

8. Choose meeting places

One near your home and one further away, in case you are separated.

9. Talk to the places they attend

Ask their school, workplace or day center about its plans to evacuate people with disabilities and to contact families.

10. Practice the plan

Practice calmly, involve everyone, and follow instructions from the official authorities.

Good to know

Saudi Arabia's Law of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities gives attention to their needs in emergencies. Tell emergency teams about your family member's needs and how they communicate. APD and the General Directorate of Civil Defense have also prepared the Emergency Evacuation Guide for Persons with Disabilities, so you can ask the places your family member attends about their evacuation arrangements.

Tips for different needs

- **Deaf or hard of hearing:** Use alerts they can see or feel, such as flashing lights or phone vibration, turn on emergency alerts on their phone, and keep spare hearing aid batteries.
- **Physical disability:** Keep a powered wheelchair charged, and keep the way out clear.
- **Blind or low vision:** Offer your arm to hold just above the elbow, and walk half a step ahead.



Our family emergency card

Fill in this card together, and keep it somewhere safe and easy to reach. Write only what you are comfortable sharing, and update it when things change.

Name	
Main contact name and phone	
Second contact name and phone	
Family meeting places	
Disability, needs and way of communicating	
Medicines and assistive devices	
Doctor's phone	
School, workplace or center phone	

Chapter 10

If you receive an official warning message

Warning messages may reach mobile phones from the National Early Warning Platform for Emergencies. The General Directorate of Civil Defense (998.gov.sa) advises everyone to follow these instructions:

1. Remain calm

Remain calm and follow official instructions. Tell your family member what is happening, in their own way of communicating.

2. Go to the nearest safe place

Go immediately to the nearest safe place, inside a building or an interior room away from windows, and stay there until the danger has passed. Take your family member's medicines, devices and comfort items with you.

3. Stay inside

Do not leave your home or building until the danger has passed. Stay away from open areas, windows and glass, and do not stand on balconies or roofs.

4. If you are outdoors

Enter the nearest building, or take shelter behind a solid barrier.

5. If you are driving

Pull over to the side of the road, away from bridges and high-rise buildings.

6. Avoid crowds and photos

Avoid crowds and dangerous areas, and do not take photos.

7. Call if you notice danger

Call 911 in the regions of Makkah, Madinah, Riyadh and the Eastern Province, or 998 in the rest of the Kingdom.

8. Follow official channels

Follow the instructions issued by the competent authorities through official channels.

Adapting the steps

- **Deaf or hard of hearing:** Turn on vibration and flash alerts on their phone, and explain the message with signs, pictures or text.
- **Blind or low vision:** Read the message aloud, and guide them to the safe place, describing each step.
- **Autism or sensory needs:** Keep the safe place quiet, and offer headphones and a familiar item.
- **Intellectual disability:** Use short, simple words, such as "We stay inside together", and repeat them calmly.
- **Physical disability:** Choose a safe place they can reach easily, and keep mobility aids and equipment with them.

Chapter 11

When to seek help

Contact the emergency services straight away if your family member:

- Talks about hurting themselves or others, or hurts themselves.
- Shows extreme distress that does not settle.

Consider talking to a specialist if, after about a month:

- Reactions are not easing, or are getting worse.
- Worry, sadness, anger or bad dreams affect sleep or daily life.
- They avoid people, places or activities they used to enjoy.
- They lose skills they had, or self-harm or repetitive behavior increases.

> **Remember**
>
> **Asking for help early is a sign of care. You do not need to wait if you are worried. You can start with your family doctor, or call 937 for health advice. Emergency numbers are at the end of the guide.**

A final word

> **Our loved ones do not need every answer. They need calm hearts beside them.**

Emergencies can be hard, but preparing, communicating and reassuring each other help everyone cope.

Every person has their own needs and ways of expressing feelings. Knowing your family member, involving them, and asking for support when needed make a real difference.

The advice in this guide is general. Each family is best placed to choose what suits them, with advice from specialists when needed.

May God protect everyone and keep us all safe and at peace.

Where this advice comes from

- APD and Civil Defense: Emergency Evacuation Guide for Persons with Disabilities (2022), on APD's guides page
- General Directorate of Civil Defense: If you receive warning messages from the National Early Warning Platform for Emergencies (2026)
- World Health Organization: Psychological first aid, guide for field workers
- Hobfoll et al. (2022): Five essential elements of mass trauma intervention
- NICE guideline NG116: Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Child Mind Institute: Helping Children Cope After a Traumatic Event
- CDC: Children with Special Healthcare Needs in a Disaster
- ASHA: Preparedness tips for hearing aid and communication device users
- Qatar News Agency: Ministry of Public Health guide for children with autism spectrum disorder (2026)
- Umm Al-Qura (official gazette): Approval of the Law of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2023)
- Law of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2023)
- Child Helpline International: Saudi Child Helpline 116111

Emergency numbers in Saudi Arabia

Save these numbers in your phone, and make sure everyone in the family knows when and how to call them.

Number	Service
911	Unified emergency number (Makkah, Madinah, Riyadh and the Eastern Province)
999	Police
997	Ambulance (Saudi Red Crescent)
998	Civil Defense, and reporting any danger outside the 911 regions
937	Ministry of Health advice line
116111	Child Helpline (free, daily, 7 a.m. to 11 p.m.)

> **Remember**
>
> **When you call, say that the person has a disability and what they need.**