



What will happen to me?
What shall I do?

Disasters & ASD

Preparedness for Disasters



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Contents

What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?	3
~ From D of a disorder To D of a diversity ~	
“These things” happen in times of disasters !	5
How to Cope ①	6
· Escaping with strangers	
· Spending time in shelters	
· No electricity and tap water	
How to Cope ②	7
· Change from usual routine	
· Disturbing images and news on TV	
· Waiting in long lines	
How to Cope ③	8
· You have to be quiet	
· Stressful environment with sounds	
How to Cope ④	9
· Misunderstanding	
· Sleeping with lights on	
How to Cope ⑤	10
· Japanese-style toilets	
· Not noticing the injuries	
· When plans change	
Psychological Signs During Disasters	11
Resilience After Stress and Trauma	12
Disaster Preparedness in Everyday Life ①	13
Disaster Preparedness in Everyday Life ②	14



What is Autism Spectrum Disorder?

~ From D of a disorder To D of a diversity ~

- Children with ASD has difficulty in communication with and relating to others, and exhibit restricted patterns of behaviour and interests.
- The term 'spectrum' in Autism Spectrum Disorder highlights the broad range of diversity. So each child with ASD has different difficulties.
- Some children prefer to be alone while others like company. Some are unable to speak words while others have a wide vocabulary and love to discuss their interests. Some are very proficient at memorizing things that interest them, while others cannot recall important facts or their plans with friends. Some are highly sensitive to heat or cold while others never complain of temperature and don't care about pains at all. Some have difficulty in expressing and understanding emotions while others are very aware of feelings, even expressing guilt and depression over their perceived failings. Some are mentally disabled or struggle in school, while others excel in academics, attending acclaimed universities where they are considered brilliant.
- ASD does not derive from bad parenting, bad personalities or a lack of efforts.
- Children with ASD can be difficult for people around them to understand. As a result, they may suffer from not only ASD symptoms but also low self-confidence, lack of trust for others ,and traumatic experiences.
- Some are diagnosed by doctors, but others are not. There are not a few parents who consult experts only to be told that their child "might" have ASD. Many of these children are not definitively diagnosed for years, if ever.



- In order to understand and support these children, we must reinterpret the D in ASD to focus on Diversity rather than Disorder.
- This leaflet summarizes useful knowledge for children with ASD and their families in times of disaster or impending disaster.
- In addition, this leaflet will assist the broader community surrounding children with ASD, helping them to better understand and support these children and parents.



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“These things” happen in times of disasters !

- 1. You must escape to a safe place in a hurry, accompanied by strangers.**
- 2. You must spend time with people you don't know in places called “shelters”.**
- 3. You cannot count on electricity or tap water.**
- 4. You have no access your favourite foods, TV shows, and games.**
- 5. The TV is always on, broadcasting serious news and shocking images.**
- 6. You must wait in long lines to use the bathroom or get the supplies.**
- 7. You must be quiet or you will disturb the elderly people, the babies or the sick people in the shelter.**
- 8. You must spend hours in the midst of various noises and voices, which make you feel uncomfortable.**
- 9. The people here do not understand and accept you like your parents and teachers. They scold you when you don't behave or if you don't answer when spoken to.**
- 10. You have to sleep with the lights on.**
- 11. You must use Japanese-style toilets.**
- 12. You may have a fever. Your injuries are taking a long time to heal because you lack the specific immunities.**
- 13. Schedules and Plans often change suddenly .**





How to Cope ①

1. You must escape to a safe place in a hurry, accompanied by strangers. → Some children with ASD do not like to be suddenly grasped or touched. Be careful how you interact with them physically. Rather than touch them, come close to them and explain what has happened and what will happen next, using expressions like “We will escape together” or “We will go to a safe place, so follow me”. It is more helpful to tell them what to do rather than what not to do. If possible, model the desired behaviour so the child can mimic it.

2. You must spend time with people you don't know in places called “shelters”. → Children with ASD may be very uncomfortable and insecure due to the constant noises, unusual smells, temperature in the shelter. Whenever possible, choose a corner of the shelter for them, or place partitions around them. Muffle sounds by using earmuffs and weaken smells by using masks. Also, create a psychologically personal space by letting children do whatever seems to capture and hold their interest. Ask volunteers to take the children outside so they can get a break from the shelter. Prepare pictographs to direct children who cannot read to the drinking water locations and bathrooms.

3. You cannot count on electricity or tap water.

→ Children with ASD may be upset when they realize that they cannot follow their normal daily routines. Use cards with pictorial representations and explain the pictures with phrases like “There is no light because of power failure” or “Water doesn't come out because of the earthquake.” Help them relax by providing any information like “The lights will be on at 8:00 AM tomorrow.” Teach them how to play games without electricity. Help them get used to using candlelight at night and to using wet wipes to clean their hands and bodies.

How to Cope ②

4. You have no access your favourite foods, TV shows, and games. → Children with ASD may need to understand that changes from their usual routine will make them feel quite uncomfortable and anxious. Remain calm for them. Repeatedly explain that they will not be able to do things as usual now. As concretely as possible, tell them what they can do instead. Make lists of “Things You Cannot Do” and “Things You Can Do” and post them where the children can see them.

5.The TV is always on, broadcasting serious news and shocking images. →→ If several TVs are available, set one to broadcast a children’s program. Be careful that some children with ASD are very sensitive to visual information. They can be easily shocked and lastingly affected by disturbing images or dialogue. Even though they may not seem to be listening, they sometimes memorize a distressing phrase and recall it anxiously. Never assume that they are not listening or that they do not understand. And do not hesitate to discuss with children what they have seen and what they are feeling, or to offer any reassurances you can.

6. You must wait in long lines to use the bathroom or get the supplies. → Children with ASD often feel uneasy when they do not have anything to do. If they must wait in long lines, provide them with something that interests them (such as books, handheld games, etc.). Don’t hesitate to discuss ASD with the others in the shelter, or to ask them to watch your child if you must leave to stand in line.



How to Cope ③

7. You must be quiet or you will disturb the elderly people, the babies or the sick people in the shelter. → Children with ASD may need to be told to keep quiet in the shelter. To help remind them, write “Keep Quiet Here” on a piece of paper and post it where they can see. If the shelter is particularly large, children may naturally mistake it for a space where they can shout and run around. Patiently explain the situation using phrases like “Things have to be different for a little while” or “This is not like our regular life.” Explain what kind of place the shelter is. Use pictographs or drawings to demonstrate what level of voice is appropriate. Remember that, if some children are talking more than usual, it may be because they feel insecure. Rather than becoming angry, try to empathize with their fear and confusion. Reassure them and share information clearly with them. If possible, place their favourite belongings beside them.

8. You must spend hours in the midst of various noises and voices, which make you feel uncomfortable. → Many children with ASD are sensitive to sounds. An emergency shelter, with its constant mix of voices and strange noises, can be an especially stressful environment. Some children with ASD will be most disturbed by loud or percussive sounds and voices, while others will find whispering intolerable. In these cases, patience will not always be the best remedy. Instead, offer the children earmuffs or a hooded sweatshirt, or wrap their heads with blankets. Another good solution is to have them listen to their favourite music with headphones. Or take them outside away from all the people for a change of pace.





How to Cope ④

9. The people here do not understand and accept you like your parents and teachers. They scold you when you don't behave or if you don't answer when spoken to. →→ In the Great East Japan Earthquake of 2011, many children with ASD were initially very well-behaved in the face of disaster. Through their close attention to environmental cues and their parents' attitudes, they readily grasped the seriousness of the situation. But this state was only temporary. After a time, the demands of their ASD overwhelmed their parents. Unsocial behaviors began to appear, along with heightened sensitivities and unusual dietary requirements. Many children with ASD have strong preferences and aversions for foods. This is not because they are "selfish" or lack proper parenting, but because they are very sensitive to differences in taste, smell, and touch and have rigid behaviors regarding their meals. To help them cope, prepare their favourite foods in your backpack. Remember that their rigid food requirements are simply a way for these children to get relief. And don't hesitate to explain to others that children with ASD have their own ways of protecting themselves. Their preferences help them feel safe and secure.

10. You have to sleep with the lights on. → In shelters there are occasions when the lights must be left on. Some children with ASD may have trouble sleeping under these conditions. If possible, provide them with a sleeping mask or use partitions to block the lights from their sleeping area. Conversely, for children who require a night light to sleep, wrap a piece of cloth around the top of a flashlight or set a flashlight upside down on the floor so it does not disrupt the other sleepers. Some children with ASD may feel a sense of calm and relief by being wrapped in blankets. Others may feel uncomfortable at being obliged to sleep with their clothes on. Explain the situation, saying "This is because we don't have any pajamas."

How to Cope ⑤



11. You must use Japanese-style toilets.

→ If it is their first experience, there are children who feel very uneasy, and some don't want to go to the toilet. It is good to practice regularly as much as possible. Some shelters may have special equipment which changes Japanese-style toilets to western-style toilets but there are quite a few. Some children cannot bear the smell. In those cases, tell them to use masks. It will be good to practice how to flush with a bucket full of water and use wet wipes instead of toilet paper and hand wash in case the water stops. Tell them that it will not be good for their health if they resist going to the toilet. Be aware that the toilet is important to maintain one's health.

12. You may have a fever. Your injuries are taking a long time to heal because you lack the specific immunities. → Some children with ASD are very sensitive to their physical sensations, while others are not. In the latter cases, be careful not to miss their injuries and illnesses. Even if they get a serious wound, they sometimes don't complain at all and miss out on proper treatment. Once evacuated, parents must check a physical state of their child's. Examine them to see that there is no bleeding, swelling or fever. If there seems to be a problem, receive treatment immediately. In times of disaster, injuries and illnesses take more time to recover because the immune system doesn't work well.

13. Schedules and Plans often change suddenly . → Most children with ASD are not good at "sudden changes". They feel uncomfortable with the uncertainty or the unpredictable conditions. Write out schedule as much as you know and put it on somewhere they can see it. They will feel safe, secure, and stable if they can check the daily schedule.



Psychological Signs During Disasters



- ◆ Some children with ASD may exhibit unusually “good” behavior in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. For example, they may eat foods they would not usually tolerate. However, this resolution of behavioural issues is only temporary, and the child’s ASD symptoms are likely to return as the immediate danger recedes and the lifeline recovers.
- ◆ Self-mutilation and problem behaviours which were not seen in the past may appear.
- ◆ Wetting accidents, finger sucking and baby talk that had been resolved long ago may return.
- ◆ Some children may become more irritated than usual .
- ◆ Some children may not be able to fall asleep or suffer from nightmares.
- ◆ Some children may recall unpleasant things by trifles related to the disaster experience, while at the same time have difficulty remembering the salient points of the matters related to the disaster experience.
- ◆ Compulsive behaviours may become worse than before. Children may confirm things many times, or repeat the same questions.
- ◆ Some children may be made anxious by serious conversation or by serious looks of concern on the faces of adults.



Resilience After Stress and Trauma

- ◆ It is not unusual for these signs to continue for weeks. These signs communicate important information — namely, that the children are hurt and terrified and need help, but also that they have begun to cope with the stress and trauma by themselves.
- ◆ In the context of a disaster, it is normal for human beings to be hurt both physically and psychologically. But humans also have a very real ability to recover from traumatic experiences and survive intact. In fact, everyone has this ability, of course, even children with disabilities have it.
- ◆ Only a few of these signs will develop into post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a dissociative disorder, or other serious mental conditions. When they do, however, professionals will be needed to support children and families.
- ◆ The interpersonal connections will be a crucial for promoting their power of resilience. And finally the 3 Ss – Safety (providing distance from danger and protecting a life etc.), Security (allowing children to express their feelings and feel accepted etc.), Stability (getting back to daily habits and making future plans etc.) (Maekawa 2014)– will also be critical to the recovery process.



Disaster Preparedness in Everyday Life ②

Basic Preparedness checklist!

- Check the contents of your disaster preparedness backpack and your supplies of non-perishable foods and bottled water.
- Write down the telephone numbers of professionals and persons whose help you may need.
- Check not only the location of the shelter closest to your home, but also the location of the welfare shelter.

Learning and sharing!

- Learn the specific needs of your child and discuss them with your family.
- Talk with your family about what their expectations and plans in the event of a disasters.
- Establish a way to contact your family and inform them of your location in case you are separated.
- Talk with your family about your own potential needs and share what you can do and what makes you feel uncomfortable.
- Share the specific needs of your child and family with your teachers, classmates, and neighbours.
- Learn and share battery-free games such as card games, Uno, shadow puppets, Hand Game Songs etc.



Disaster Preparedness in Everyday Life ②

Practice makes perfect!

- Determine the evacuate shelter and practice walking there.
Once you have evacuated, you had better not move around.
- Practice how to use emergency number, such as NTT 171, and leave a message since mobile phones often will not operate in times of disasters.
- Practice putting on masks, eye-masks and earmuffs.
- Try to spend a night with only candlelight.
- Practice using Japanese-style toilets and wet wipes.
- Try sleeping in a sleeping bag and a tent.
- Try eating emergency provisions.
- Remember that you and your child can learn preparedness through daily practice and drills.

You can make use of the following Apps for iPad:

“Mamoru Pack”

My Ready to Go Backpack

Preparedness in disasters

<http://www.wasa.or.jp>





Memo



◆ Evacuation shelters

- If you are at home in times of disaster.....

- If you are outside in times of disaster.....

- If you are at school in times of disaster.....

◆ Significant telephone numbers

- Parents
- Relatives
- Friends
- Others

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